

AUGUST, 1959

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DAMNATION MORNING

By Fritz Leiber

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fantastic

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FAN 8-9



Editorial

THERE'S very little more fantastic in the world of reality than the burden of memories we carry around with us in some as yet unspecified cranny of the brain. If I had a nickel for every s-f writer who likened the storing up of memories in the human consciousness to the magnetic tape which stores facts for the computer's mind, I'd be a wealthy man—able to go off someplace and live it up and put together a few *real* memories.

But the most fantastic thing about memory is how far back it goes. Experiments conducted at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine recently have started to show the immensity of memory's range. Psychiatrists at the college are making what they feel may be the first effort to systematically collect the *earliest* memories of people, in the hope that they will discover a link between memory patterns and personality development that may be useful in diagnosing or helping to solve psychiatric problems.

Here are some of their findings: most people can remember back only to the third or fourth year of life. Most remember incidents involving Mom rather than Dad. In most of these incidents, Mom is a scold, a shrew, a nag. Even most non-Mom-connected early memories are unpleasant ones. Most people see themselves in early memories. Ten percent of all visual memories are in color.

Most fascinating of all. One woman said she could remember being in the womb with her identical twin sister, and could remember being born.

That reminds me, what did I do with that letter I was supposed to mail yesterday?—NL

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*Good and Evil merge in a silver spinning
... and a sign on the forehead shall be the
mark ... and Eternity will beckon a man on*

DAMNATION MORNING

By FRITZ LEIBER

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

TIME traveling, which is not quite the good clean boyish fun it's cracked up to be, started for me when this woman with the sigil on her forehead looked in on me from the open doorway of the hotel bedroom where I'd hidden myself and the bottles and asked me, "Look, Buster, do you want to live?"

It was the sort of question would have suited a religious crackpot of the strong-arm, save-your-soul variety, but she didn't look like one. And I might very well have answered it—in fact, I almost did—with a hangover, one-percent humorous, "Good God, no!" Or—a poor second—I could have studied the dark, dust-burnished arabesques of the faded blue carpet for a perversely long

time and then countered with a grudging, "Oh, if you insist."

But I didn't, perhaps because there didn't seem to be anything like one percent of humor in the situation. Point One: I have been blacked out the past half hour or so—this woman might just have opened the door or she might have been watching me for ten minutes. Point Two: I was in the fringes of DTs, trying to come off a big drunk. Point Three: I knew for certain that I had just killed someone or left him or her to die, though I hadn't the faintest idea of whom or why.

Let me try to picture my state of mind a little more vividly. My consciousness, the sentient self-aware part of

me, was a single quivering point in the center of an endless plane vibrating harshly with misery and menace. I was like a man in a rowboat in the middle of the Pacific—or better, I was like a man in a shellhole in the North African desert (I served under Montgomery and any region adjoining the DTs is certainly a No Man's Land). Around me, in every direction—this is my consciousness I'm describing, remember—miles of flat burning sand, nothing more. Way beyond the horizon were two divorced wives, some estranged children, assorted jobs, and other unexceptional wreckage. Much closer, but still beyond the horizon, were State Hospital (twice) and Psycho (four times). Shallowly buried very near at hand, or perhaps blackening in the open just behind me in the shellhole, was the person I had killed.

But remember that I knew I had killed a real person. *That* wasn't anything allegorical.

Now for a little more detail on this "Look, Buster" woman. To begin with, she didn't resemble any part of the DTs or its outlying kingdoms, though an amateur might have thought differ-

ently—especially if he had given too much weight to the sigil on her forehead. But it was no amateur.

She seemed about my age—forty-five—but I couldn't be sure. Her body looked younger than that, her face older; both were trim and had seen a lot of use, I got the impression. She was wearing black sandals and a black unbelted tunic with just a hint of the sack dress to it, yet she seemed dressed for the street. It occurred to me even then (off-track ideas can come to you very swiftly and sharply in the DT outskirts) that it was a costume that, except perhaps for the color, would have fitted into any number of historical eras: old Egypt, Greece, maybe the Directoire, World War I, Burma, Yucatan, to name some. (Should I ask her if she spoke Mayathan? I didn't, but I don't think the question would have fazed her; she seemed altogether sophisticated, a real cosmopolite—she pronounced "Buster" as if it were part of a curious, somewhat ridiculous jargon she was using for shock purposes.)

From her left arm hung a black handbag that closed with a drawstring and from which protruded the tip of silvery object about which I



When he first saw her, he thought he'd gone
beyond the fringes of DTs.

found myself apprehensively curious.

Her right arm was raised and bent, the elbow touching the door frame, the hand brushing back the very dark bangs from her forehead to show me the sigil, as if that had a bearing on her question.

The sigil was an eight-limbed asterisk made of fine dark lines and about as big as a silver dollar. An X superimposed on a plus sign. It looked permanent.

Except for the bangs she wore her hair pinned up. Her ears were flat, thin-edged, and nicely shaped, with the long lobes that in Chinese art mark the philosopher. Small square silver flats with rounded corners ornamented them.

Her face might have been painted by Toulouse-Lautrec or Degas. The skin was webbed with very fine lines; the eyes were darkly shadowed and there was a touch of green on the lids (Egyptian?—I asked myself); her mouth was wide, tolerant, but realistic. Yes, beyond all else, she seemed realistic.

And as I've indicated, I was ready for realism, so when she asked, "Do you want to live?" I somehow managed not to let slip any of the flip-

pant answers that came flocking into my mouth, I realized that this was the one time in a million when a big question is really meant and your answer really counts and there are no second chances, I realized that the line of my life had come to one of those points where there's a kink in it and the wrong (or maybe the right) tug can break it and that she knew all about this—that as far as I was concerned at the present moment, she knew all about everything.

So I thought for a bit, not long, and I answered, "Yes."

She nodded—not as if she approved my decision, or disapproved it for that matter, but merely as if she accepted it as a basis for negotiations—and she let her bangs fall back across her forehead. Then she gave me a quick dry smile and she said, "In that case you and I have got to get out of here and do some talking."

For me that smile was the first break in the shell—the shell around my rancid consciousness or perhaps the dark, star-pricked shell around the space-time continuum.

"Come on," she said. "No, just as you are. Don't stop for anything and—" (She caught the direction of my imme-

diate natural movement)
“—*don't look behind you* if you meant that about wanting to live.”

Ordinarily being told not to look behind you is a remarkably silly piece of advice, it makes you think of those “pursuing fiend” horror stories that scare children, and you look around automatically—if only to prove you're no child. Also in this present case there was my very real and dreadful curiosity: I wanted terribly (yes, terribly) to know whom it was I had just killed—a forgotten third wife? a stray woman? a jealous husband or boyfriend? (though I seemed too cracked up for love affairs) the hotel clerk? a fellow derelict?

But somehow, as with her “want to live” question, I had the sense to realize that this was one of those times when the usually silly statement is dead serious, that she meant her warning quite literally.

If I looked behind me, I would die.

I looked straight ahead as I stepped past the scattered brown empty bottles and the thin fume mounting from the tiny crater in the carpet where I'd dropped a live cigarette.

As I followed her through

the door I caught, from the window behind me, the distant note of a police siren.

Before we reached the elevator the siren was nearer and it sounded as if the fire department had been called out too.

I saw a silvery flicker ahead. There was a big mirror facing the elevators.

“What I told you about not looking behind you goes for mirrors too,” my conductress informed me. “Until I tell you differently.”

The instant she said that, I knew that I had forgotten what I looked like; I simply could not visualize that dreadful witness (generally inhabiting a smeary bathroom mirror) of so many foggy mornings: my own face. One glance in the mirror . . .

But I told myself: realism. I saw a blur of brown shoes and black sandals in the big mirror, nothing more.

The cage of the right-hand elevator, dark and empty, was stopped at this floor. A cross-wise wooden bar held the door open. My conductress removed the bar and we stepped inside. The door closed and she touched the controls. I wondered, “Which way will it go? Sideways?”

It began to sink normally.

I started to touch my face, but didn't. I started to try to remember my name, but stopped. It would be bad tactics, I thought, to let myself become aware of any more gaps in my knowledge. I knew I was alive. I would stick with that for a while.

The cage sank two and a half floors and stopped, its doorway blocked by the drab purple wall of the shaft. My conductress switched on the tiny dome light and turned to me.

"Well?" she said.

I put my last thought into words.

"I'm alive," I said, "and I'm in your hands."

She laughed lightly. "You find it a compromising situation? But you're quite correct. You accepted life from me, or through me, rather. Does that suggest anything to you?"

My memory may have been lousy, but another, long unused section of my mind was clicking. "When you get anything," I said, "you have to pay for it and sometimes money isn't enough, though I've only once or twice been in situations where money didn't help."

"Three times now," she said. "Here is how it stacks up: You've bought your way, with something other than

money, into an organization of which I am an agent. Or perhaps you'd rather go back to the room where I recruited you? We might just be able to manage it."

Through the walls of the cage and shaft I could hear the sirens going full blast, underlining her words.

I shook my head. I said, "I think I knew that—I mean, that I was joining an organization—when I answered your first question."

"It's a very big organization," she went on, as if warning me. "Call it an empire or a power if you like. So far as you are concerned, it has always existed and always will exist. It has agents everywhere, literally. Space and time are no barriers to it. Its purpose, so far as you will ever be able to know it, is to change, for its own aggrandizement, not only the present and future, but also the past. It is a ruthlessly competitive organization and is merciless to its employees."

"I. G. Farben?" I asked, grabbing nervously and clumsily at humor.

She didn't rebuke my flippancy, but said, "And it isn't the Communist Party or the Ku Klux Klan, or the Avenging Angels or the Black Hand,

either, though its enemies give it a nastier name."

"Which is?" I asked.

"The Spiders," she said.

That word gave me the shudders, coming so suddenly. I expected the sigil to step off her forehead and scuttle down her face and leap at me—something like that.

She watched me. "You might call it the Double Cross," she suggested, "if that seems better."

"Well, at least you don't try to prettify your organization," was all I could think to say.

She shook her head. "With the really big ones you don't have to. You never know if the side into which you are born or reborn is 'right' or 'good'—you only know that it's your side and you try to learn about it and form an opinion as you live and serve."

"You talk about sides," I said. "Is there another?"

"We won't go into that now," she said, "but if you ever meet someone with an S on his forehead, he's not a friend, no matter what else he may be to you. *That S* stands for Snakes."

I don't know why *that* word, coming just then, gave me so much worse a scare—crystalized all my fears, as it

were—but it did. Maybe it was only some little thing, like Snakes meaning DTs. Whatever it was, I felt myself turning to mush.

"Maybe we'd better go back to the room where you found me," I heard myself saying. I don't think I meant it, though I surely felt it. The sirens had stopped, but I could hear a lot of general hubbub, outside the hotel and inside it too, I thought—noise from the other elevator shaft and, it seemed to me, from the floor we'd just left—hurrying footsteps, taut voices, something being dragged. I knew terror here, in this stalled elevator, but that *loudness* outside would be worse.

"It's too late now," my conductress informed me. She slitted her eyes at me. "You see, Buster," she said, "*you're still back in that room*. You might be able to handle the problem of rejoining yourself if you went back alone, but not with other people around."

"What did you do to me?" I said very softly.

"I'm a Ressurrectionist," she said as quietly. "I dig bodies out of the space-time continuum and give them the freedom of the fourth dimension. When I Resurrected you, I cut you out of your lifeline

close to the point that you think of as the Now."

"My lifeline?" I interrupted. "Something in my palm?"

"All of you from your birth to your death," she said. "A you-shaped rope embedded in the space-time continuum—I cut you out of it. Or I made a fork in your lifeline, if you want to think of it that way, and you're in the free branch. But the other you, the buried you, the one people think of as the real you, is back in your room with the other Zombies going through the motions."

"But how can you cut people out of their lifelines?" I asked. "As a bull-session theory, perhaps. But to actually do it—"

"You can if you have the proper tool," she said flatly, swinging her handbag. "Any number of agents might have done it. A Snake might have done it as easily as a Spider. Might still—but we won't go into that."

"But if you've cut me out of my lifeline," I said, "and given me the freedom of the fourth dimension, why are we in the same old space-time? That is, if this elevator still is—"

"It is," she assured me. "We're still in the same space-time because I haven't led us out of it. We're moving

through it at the same temporal speed as the you we left behind, keeping pace with his Now. But we both have an added mode of freedom, at present imperceptible and inoperative. Don't worry, I'll make a Door and get us out of here soon enough—if you pass the test."

I stopped trying to understand her metaphysics. Maybe I was between floors with a maniac. Maybe I was a maniac myself. No matter—I would just go on clinging to what *felt* like reality. "Look," I said, "that person I murdered, or left to die, is he back in the room too? Did you see him—or her?"

She looked at me and then nodded. She said carefully, "The person you killed or doomed is still in the room."

An aching impulse twisted me a little. "Maybe I should try to go back—" I began. "Try to go back and unite the selves . . ."

"It's too late now," she repeated.

"But I want to," I persisted. "There's something pulling at me, like a chain hooked to my chest."

She smiled unpleasantly. "Of course there is," she said. "It's the vampire in you—the same thing that

drew me to your room or would draw any Spider or Snake. The blood scent of the person you killed or doomed."

I drew back from her. "Why do you keep saying 'or'?" I blustered. "I didn't look but you must have *seen*. You must *know*. *Whom did I kill?* And what is the Zombie me doing back there in that room with the body?"

"There's no time for that now," she said, spreading the mouth of her handbag. "Later you can go back and find out, if you pass the test."

She drew from her handbag a pale gray gleaming implement that looked by quick turns to me like a knife, a gun, a slim scepter, and a delicate branding iron — especially when its tip sprouted an eight-limbed star of silver wire.

"The test?" I faltered, staring at the thing.

"Yes, to determine whether you can live in the fourth dimension or only die in it."

The star began to spin, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Then it held still, but something that was part of it or created by it went on spinning like a Helmholtz color wheel—a fugitive, flashing rainbow spiral. It looked like the brain's own circular scan-

ning pattern become visible and that frightened me because that is what you see at the onset of alcoholic hallucinations.

"Close your eyes," she said.

I wanted to jerk away, I wanted to lunge at her, but I didn't dare. Something might shake loose in my brain if I did. The spiral flashed through the wiry fringe of my eyebrows as she moved it closer. I closed my eyes.

Something stung my forehead icily, like ether, and I instantly felt that I was moving forward with an easy rise and fall, as if I were riding a very gentle roller-coaster. There was a low pulsing roar in my ears.

I snapped my eyes open. The illusion vanished. I was standing stock still in the elevator and the only sounds were the continuing hubbub that had succeeded the sirens. My conductress was smiling at me, encouragingly.

I closed my eyes again. Instantly I was surging forward through the dark on the gentle roller-coaster and the hubbub was an almost musical roar that rose and fell. Smoky lights showed ahead. I glided through a cobblestoned alleyway where cloaked and broad-hatted bravoos with rapiers swinging at

their sides turned their heads to stare at me knowingly, while women in gaudy dresses that swept the dirt leered in a way that was half inviting, half contemptuous.

Darkness swallowed them. An iron gate clanged behind me. Bluer, cleaner lights sprang up. I passed a field studded with tall silver ships. Tall, slender-limbed men and women in blue and silver smocks broke off their tasks or games to watch me—evenly but a little sadly, I thought. They drifted out of sight behind me and another gate clanged. For a moment the pulsing sound shaped itself into words: "There's a road to travel. It's a road that's wide . . ."

I opened my eyes again. I was back in the stalled elevator, hearing the muted hubbub, facing my smiling conductress. It was very strange—an illusion that could be turned on or off by lowering or raising the eyelids. I remembered fleetingly that the brain's alpha rhythm, which may be the rhythm of its scanning pattern idling, vanishes when you open your eyes and I wondered if the roller-coaster was the alpha rhythm.

When I closed my eyes this time I plunged deeper into the illusion. I burst through

many scenes: a street of flashing swords, the central aisle of a dark cavernous factory filled with unknown untended machines, a Chinese pavilion, a Harlem nightclub, a square filled with brightly-painted statues and noisy white-togaed men, a humped road across which a ragged muddy-footed throng fled in terror from a porticoed temple which showed only as wide bars of light rising in a mist from behind a low hill.

And always the half-music pulsed without cease. From time to time I heard the "Road to Travel" song repeated with two endings, now one, now another: "It leads around the cosmos to the other side," and "It leads to insanity or suicide."

I could have whichever ending I chose, it seemed to me—I needed only will it.

And then it burst on me that I could go wherever I wanted, see whatever I wanted, just by willing it. I was traveling along that dark mysterious avenue, swaying and undulating in every dimension of freedom, that leads to every hidden vista of the unconscious mind, to any and every spot in space and time—the avenue of the adventurer freed from all limitations.

I grudgingly opened my eyes again to the stalled elevator. "This is the test?" I asked my conductress quickly. She nodded, watching me speculatively, no longer smiling. I dove eagerly back into the darkness.

In the exultation of my newly realized power I skimmed a universe of sensation, darting like a bird or bee from scene to scene: a battle, a banquet, a pyramid a-building, a tatter-sailed ship in a storm, beasts of all descriptions, a torture chamber, a death ward, a dance, an orgy, a leprosary, a satellite launching, a stop at a dead star between galaxies, a newly-created android rising from a silver vat, a witch-burning, a cave birth, a crucifixion . . .

Suddenly I was afraid. I had gone so far, seen so much, so many gates had clanged behind me, and there was no sign of my free flight stopping or even slowing down. I could control where I went, but not whether I went—I had to keep on going. And going. And going.

My mind was tired. When your mind is tired and you want to sleep you close your eyes. But if, whenever you close your eyes, you start going again, you start traveling the road . . .

I opened mine. "How do I ever sleep?" I asked the woman. My voice had gone hoarse.

She didn't answer. Her expression told me nothing. Suddenly I was very frightened. But at the same time I was horribly tired, mind and body. I closed my eyes . . .

I was standing on a narrow ledge that gritted under the soles of my shoes whenever I inched a step one way or another to ease the cramps in my leg muscles. My hands and the back of my head were flattened against a gritty wall. Sweat stung my eyes and trickled inside my collar. There was a medley of voices I was trying not to hear. Voices far below.

I looked down at the toes of my shoes, which jutted out a little over the edge of the ledge. The brown leather was dusty and dull. I studied each gash in it, each rolled or loose peeling of tanned surface, each pale shallow pit.

Around the toes of my shoes a crowd of people clustered, but small, very small—tiny oval faces mounted crosswise on oval bodies that were scarcely larger—navy beans each mounted on a kidney bean. Among them were red and black rectangles, proportionately small—police cars

and fire trucks. Between the toes of my shoes was an empty gray space.

In spirit or actuality, I was back in the body I had left in the hotel bedroom, the body that had climbed through the window and was threatening to jump.

I could see from the corner of my eye that someone in black was standing beside me, in spirit or actuality. I tried to turn my head and see who it was, but that instant the invisible roller-coaster seized me and I surged forward and—this time—down.

The faces started to swell. Slowly.

A great scream puffed up at me from them. I tried to ride it but it wouldn't hold me. I plunged on down, face first.

The faces below continued to swell. Faster. Much faster, and then . . .

One of them looked *all matted hair* except for the forehead, which had an S on it.

My fall took me past that horror face and then checked three feet from the gray pavement (I could see fine, dust-drifted cracks and a trodden wad of chewing gum) and without pause I shot upward again, like a high diver who fetches bottom, or as if

I'd hit an invisible sponge-rubber cushion yards thick.

I soared upward in a great curve, losing speed all the time, and landed without a jar on the ledge from which I'd just fallen.

Beside me stood the woman in black. A gust of wind ruffled her bangs and I saw the eight-limbed sigil on her forehead.

I felt a surge of desire and I put my arms around her and pulled her face toward mine.

She smiled but she dipped her head so that our foreheads touched instead of our lips.

Ether ice shocked my brain. I closed my eyes for an instant.

When I opened them we were back in the stalled elevator and she was drawing away from me with a smile and I felt a wonderful strength and freshness and power, as if all avenues were open to me now without compulsion, as if all space and time were my private preserve.

I closed my eyes and there was only blackness quiet as the grave and close as a caress. No roller-coaster, no scanning pattern digging movement and faces from the dark, no realms of the DT

fringes. I laughed and I opened my eyes.

My conductress was at the controls of the elevator and we were dropping smoothly and her smile was sardonic but comradely now, as if we were fellow professionals.

The elevator stopped and the door slid open on the crowded lobby and we stepped out arm in arm. My partner checked a moment in her stride and I saw her lift an "Out of Order" sign off the door and drop it behind the sand vase.

We strode toward the entrance. I knew what Zombies were now—the people around me, hotel folk, public, cops, firemen. They were all staring toward the entrance, where the revolving doors were pinned open, as if they were waiting (an eternity, if necessary) for something to happen. They didn't see us at all—except that one or two trembled uneasily, like folk touched by nightmares, as we brushed past them.

As we went through the doorway my partner said to me rapidly, "When we get outside do whatever you have to, but when I touch your shoulder come with me. There'll be a Door behind you."

Once more she drew the gray implement from her handbag and there was a silver spinning beside me. I did not look at it.

I walked out into empty sidewalk and a scream that came from dozens of throats. Hot sunlight struck my face. We were the only souls for ten yards around, then came a line of policemen and the screaming mob. Everyone of them was looking straight up, except for a man in dirty shirtsleeves who was pushing his way, head down, between two cops.

You know the sound when a butcher slams a chunk of beef down on the chopping block? I heard that now, only much bigger. I blinked my eyes and there was a body on its back in the middle of the empty space and the finest spray of blood was misting down on the gray sidewalk.

I sprang forward and knelt beside the body, vaguely aware that the man who had pushed between the cops was doing the same from the other side. I studied the face of the man who had leaped to his death.

The face was unmarred, though it was rather closer to the sidewalk than it would have been if the back of the head had been intact. It was

a face with a week's beard on it that rose higher than the cheekbones—the big forehead was the only sizable space on it clear of hair. It was the tormented face of a drunk, but now at peace. It was a face I knew, in fact had always known. It was simply the face my conductress had not let me see, the face of the person I had doomed to die: myself.

I lifted my hand and this time I let it touch the week's growth of beard matting my face.

Well, I thought, I had given the crowd an exciting half hour.

I lifted my eyes and there on the other side of the body was the dirty-sleeved man. It was the same beard-matted face as that on the ground be-

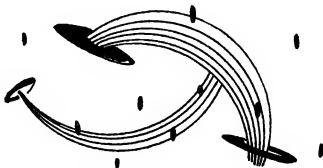
tween us, the same beard-matted face as my own.

On the forehead was a black S that looked permanent.

He was staring at my face—and then at my forehead—with a surprise, and then a horror, that I knew my own features were registering too as I stared at him. A hand touched my shoulder.

My conductress had told me that you never know whether the side into which you are born or reborn is "right" or "good." Now, as I turned and saw the shimmering silver man-high Door behind me, and her hand vanishing into it, and as I stepped through, past a rim of velvet blackness and stars, I clung to that memory, for I knew that I would be fighting on both sides forever.

THE END



LET X = ALLIGATOR

By JACK SHARKEY

The irrepressible Mr. Sharkey returns with an unbelievably believable tale of an alligator, a beautiful temptress, and a good meal.

THE alligator," said the instructor to the drowsy class, "is a rather unfortunate mammal."

"Sir," a tentacle undulated at the rear of the room.

"Yes?"

"Why do the Earth people *not* consider them mammals?"

"Well, for *one* thing, the Earth people consider them of the cold-blooded class of creatures. Since alligator blood is much warmer than *ours*, it makes them rather difficult to place on the biological scale, with any accuracy. Let it suffice that to *us*, an alligator is more of a mammal than a dog to an Earthman."

"Oh," said the student, who hadn't really much cared. He was more concerned about eating, but it looked as

though the lecture were destined to continue for hours. The student studied the sun-patterns crawling over the ceiling of the spaceship from the circular center-port in the floor, and then began to play at braiding his tentacles into a fair facsimile of a football-referee's whistle-lanyard. By forcing enough body-fluid into the nethermost tentacle tip, he even got a fair approximation of the whistle.

The instructor's voice droned on.

"Since the alligator can only bite and swallow, but cannot chew—being unequipped with any sort of tongue—it is necessary for him to *wait* for his meals to approach a *self*-shredding stage before attempting to ingorge them."

"How does he do that?"

asked a pert little pinnipedal female, her highly-colored neck-tentacles splaying out into a sort of slimy ruff.

"By installing his recently drowned—if they were air-breathing—victims, or simply dead of bites—if they were aquatic themselves—in small underwater caves or grottoes, where the natural decomposition of the bodies soon render them—er—"

"You mean," said a long pink slithery pupil who prided himself on his knowledge of Earth-talk, "they come all unglued and—"

"That will be enough," said the instructor. The pink one subsided and settled into a petulant pile of pink coils to sulk and listen.

"They decompose," said the instructor. "So all the alligator has to do is swallow them."

The mammal-question student sighed and thought of food again, little drool-thoughts impeding his thinking. When? he sighed to himself. How soon? *Ever?*

The female one, pretty well bored, wriggled a surreptitious flipper and slid closer to the center-port, staring down at the greenish-blue planet far below, and wondering what was going on down

there on such a lovely sunny day . . .

"You're so very intelligent! So wonderfully intelligent!" sighed Sarah Ann, clasping Gregory's face between her two slim strong hands and interspersing her phrases with juicy kisses.

"Nobody . . . ever loved me . . . for my . . . mind before . . ." said Gregory, trying to keep his glasses on straight, which was a problem whenever he tangled with a tense wench, which was seldom—if ever—but he manfully kept one hand on the horn-rims while the other tried to pry itself out of the deliciously warm vise of Sarah Ann's right armpit.

"You're tickling me!" giggled Sarah Ann in a voice that didn't sound as if she really minded.

"I'm sorry," said Gregory earnestly. "But if you'd just let me get my hand out of—I'm not even sure how it *got* there!"

"You reached for your calculus text . . ." said Sarah Ann huskily, "... and I rolled over."

"Look, Sarah Ann," said Gregory, slightly scarlet.

"Don't be formal," she cried, with a quivery sob. "Call me S. A."

"Essay?" asked Gregory, in some bewilderment. "Why?"

"Don't you know what it stands for?" she sighed.

"Yes," Gregory admitted. "Freedom of thought, unconfin'd by the usual laws of literature. It can even ramble."

"You're telling *me!*" laughed Sarah Ann. "But come!" she leaped to her feet with a flounce of salmon-and-puce silk, and hand-tugged him across the room to a small escritoire, on which a pen, paper, compass, protractor and logarithmic chart had been laid out. "I have a problem for you," she said.

"You *are* a problem for me," Gregory corrected her. "What will happen if the dean finds out? I'm supposed to be over at Columbia, listening to a lecture of paramount mathematical importance on space-trips to the moon. It's called, 'To the Vector Belongs the Spoils.' I thought it rather clever."

"Wouldn't you rather be with me?" Sarah Ann pouted.

"Well, of course, Sarah Ann, but—"

"S. A."

"Essay," he shrugged. "Yes, I would. But would the dean understand? I mean, really?"

"What carest thou of things pedagogical when thou'rt be-

side me?" said Sarah Ann, a little loftily, but warmly.

"Well, if you put it *that* way . . ." Gregory relented a bit, his willpower bent by old English phrasings. "There's something so—" he reddened—"intimate about thees and thous."

Sarah Ann giggled and then nodded. "Ain't there, though!"

"But, to the problem," he remembered aloud.

"Sure thing," she said, adding in a sultry moan, "Thou," and moved closer.

"I don't see it," he said, pawing through and scanning the sheaves of foolscap on the small desk.

"I got it in my head," said Sarah Ann. "There's this alley, see, and two ladders and two buildings, and they're crossing each other maybe ten feet—no, exactly ten feet—over the bottom of the—"

"Wait!" said Gregory, frantically scrabbling through the litter on the desk for the pen. "There. Now, let's have it again."

"There's these ladders, see, and they're—"

"Where did you come up with this problem?" he asked, as his mind strove to return from ricochets inside giggle-chambers, to the rather strait-

ened paths of mathematic memory.

"It's always puzzled me," she said. "Ever since high school. I couldn't do it then, I couldn't even do it now."

"Well, it shouldn't take me too long, Essay," said Gregory, nudging her playfully. "Now, if you'll just give me the facts of this problem, and what to look for . . ." He waited with pen poised.

"Well," said Sarah Ann, cupping her chin in a smooth pink hand and frowning at the ceiling, "you have two ladders which are crossing this alley. One is braced against a building on one side, and one on the other. One ladder is thirty feet long, one is twenty feet long, and the place where they both cross is exactly ten feet above the alley . . ."

"Um-hmm," Gregory nodded. "Anything else?"

"Only that each ladder just reaches, exactly, the top of the building it's *not* braced against. And you gotta find out how wide is the alley and how high are the buildings."

Gregory chuckled. "Simplicity itself. This just calls for a minor knowledge of trigonometry."

Sarah Ann's eyes bugged out. "Oh, you're so intelligent!"

Gregory blushed and shook his head. "Nonsense. You see, what you have here actually are two right triangles with a common . . . er—" he blushed even redder ". . . *leg*."

Sarah Ann simpered prettily and looked away.

"Anyhow," Gregory ran a finger inside his collar and swallowed, "an application of the Pythagorean theorem—"

"So intelligent!"

"—er . . . should have the answer in no time."

"I can hardly wait," she sighed, toying with his hair as Gregory applied his algebra, trigonometry, and the Pythagorean Theorem to the problem . . .

Three hours later, Gregory, his eyes hot and burning, collar sodden and salty with sweat, and hair a tangled mat, was still struggling with the ladders in that alley.

"I can't understand it," he shook his weary head. "It seems so simple . . . It *must* be simple!"

With a growl of frustration, he crumpled up a stack of ink-scrawled papers and hurled them to the carpet. "Fresh paper!" he rasped, his hand trembling toward a glass of water.

"You figure it yet?" smiled Sarah Ann, handing him

more blank sheets and a new bottle of ink.

"Not yet," he said, groggily. "But I *will*!"

Draining the glass in a single swallow, he began the problem over again and again until . . .

Half an hour later, the pen dropped from his numb fingers and spattered over the blank white sheets in dark, glistening droplets. "I've got to rest!" he hoarsed at her. "My head—I've been thinking too hard. My mind is reeling from the t-tension of j-just concentrating."

"Every nerve ending raw?" asked Sarah Ann in a strange voice. "Every synapse quivering at the point of total dissolution? Your whole brain ready to go *Pow!* if it has to carry a greater load? Right on the brink, ready for a push over?"

"Exactly," Gregory mumbled, trying vainly to straighten his glasses.

"Good," said Sarah Ann. "Gregory . . . *Look!*"

She suddenly stood up

straight and flung away the salmon-and-puce silken covering wrapped about her.

Gregory looked.

"*Yaghhhh!*" said Gregory, blowing every neuron, ganglion and fuse in his cranium.

"... so as you can see," said the instructor, covering a yawn, "we have something in common with the alligator. We live on mental energy, which must be drained from a living subject, but *our* minds, in a manner similar to the non-tongued alligator, are unable to 'chew', as you all know. Naturally, there must be a preliminary rotting process to loosen up the brain-waves, so that we may—"

A blue light flicked on above the classroom intercom box on the wall.

"The magnetic pickup has just retrieved Sarah Ann's scout ship," said a voice. The light flicked off.

"Ah!" said the instructor, as the whole class perked up and began to buzz with happy excitement. "Class dismissed. I'll see you all back here after lunch."

THE END



MAN UNDER GLASS

By EVELYN GOLDSTEIN

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

*The city ran riot at the Carnival of Atom.
But the frenzy of the jostling crowd reached
new peaks when Craig stood up in his
flight suit. On any other night he would
have been torn to bits at once.*

DARKNESS lay outside the dome.

Inside—the city was a rare feast under glass. Peacock lanterns spun and swayed. Wreaths became crushed flowers under dancing, trampling feet.

Arm in arm went crown and foolscap; painted face and mask; dimpled and grotesque—along the festooned multiways. Beneath twisting streamers the pageanters flowed out of usual conformity in rivers of color all down the radius of streets to the foci called The Circle.

This was the annual Carnival of Atom.

"Don't hold it too tightly," Craig warned himself. He was intoxicated with the color, and the jubilation, and the pagan splendor of staid

citizenry "letting its hair down." "It will be over by morning," he kept reminding himself, "you'll make yourself sick wanting it back."

But he could not suppress his exultation, nor prevent his fingers from caressing the strange fabric of the costume he wore.

The revellers came in waves from the two-lane mobilwalks that ran perpendicular to the five-laners radiating from the Circle. There wasn't a soul who was solitary this night . . .

Except Craig . . .

He had chosen the walk because he wanted to go at his own pace, to be free to move his legs against the rough weave of trousers. He loved the faint animal smell of the worn leather jacket, the tight feel of the fitted headgear.



At the sight of the Icarus costume the girl's face froze in shock.

Even among the bizarre Craig's mask was unique. And yet the goggles of flight were an integral part of the uniform.

Occasionally merry-makers leapt the rails to dance or race on the walks. They jostled Craig, or showered him with confetti.

He smiled without humor. If they knew his real motive for being among them would they throw confetti?

Or stones?

Every instinct told him to go back to his quarters. But he did not. How could he give up this chance to go unchallenged in the throng, proudly wearing an outlawed, hated garment.

From over the rails a ballerina on the arm of a demon called: "Icarus!" Craig's step faltered. He looked at them through the blank goggles that hid expression.

"Perverted thing!" The ballerina spat, glaring through slitted mask.

"Don't try to enter for Lord Atom's favor," the demon warned. The mobilwalk bore them away from him. Craig realized he was sweating.

If they knew how he really felt . . . The rebellion that seethed in him; the deep love

he had of the censured garb—what would they say? Would tolerance die from their faces? Would raw ugly anger make them hideous?

He shivered.

He would go home. He would forget his obsessed glorification of a dishonored era of history. It would gain him nothing, and lose him—possibly his present comfortable status, possibly his future, possibly—his life . . .

Just ahead was a half-nude bikini girl with an armful of leis which she was flinging to people over the rails. She approached Craig, lifted one of the leis toward him. Her gaze caught the emblazoned wing and sun insignia on his shoulder. He saw the shock shine from behind her flowered mask. She froze.

Craig forced a sardonic grin. The girl caught the grin, looked uncertain. Then she smiled back nervously. "What designer in Antiquities ever suggested an Icarus costume!"

It was on his tongue to say: "This is an heirloom." Fortunately the girl edged past him, flashed away. He never got the lei.

With a sigh he lifted his head. Through the bobbing motley lanterns he could faintly discern starshine com-

ing filtered through the shield. How different it looked beyond the sphere's distortion. No one else in the city knew. Only Craig knew.

Last night he had gone outside the shield. He had climbed the forgotten hills.

He could still feel the sting of unbridled wind on his cheeks.

Last night he had lifted his eyes and seen night in a blaze—real night, untempered, undiffused. He had stared at the shimmering moon till it seemed to plunge out of its orbit down upon him. He had seen the stars in their uncounted enormity. And the shield of dark sky had been an arching vastness, beyond belief, beyond conception—so beautiful he had fallen to his knees and covered his eyes against the magnificent immensity.

And yet, if any of this throng guessed the place he had been, they would have cried in wrath against him.

Madman!

No! Insanity was not *his*. It was *theirs*. They were a whole world gone psycho. Mass agoraphobia.

He was thirty-seven. But he had been seven the day there had been the first inkling of it . . . of the phobia . . .

Thirty years ago the city

gates had been unlocked. Exit Day they had termed it. They had waited two hundred years for Exit Day.

Craig remembered the jubilation when Science Council had made the final traditional outer-shield testing and announced that, at long last, the atmosphere was pure again, the ground free of radioactive elements.

They had draped the city in bunting, had flown the World Flag with the twelve stars of the Enclosed Cities in a blue bowl, and the twenty red stripes of Underground cities the earthy brown background.

Craig had come on the heels of the crowd. He had squirmed and wriggled. "I can't see," he complained.

"Tell your dad to pick you up," had been the advice of a burly man.

"My dad is—" the word 'dead' trembled on boyish lips but even he could not tell people who had a life expectancy of one hundred and fifty that his father was dead. Everyone would know that as a non-conformist he had chosen extinction to Mental Adjustment. And Craig's mother also. "—working—" Craig had finally supplied. Whereupon the man had swung him high on broad

shoulders. And Craig had been just in time to see the ceremonial ribbon cut and flutter apart, and the first lock open. Craig could see the broad tunnel for flycars with its narrow pedestrian walk and, at the other end, the second lock opened.

The Council Head made a flowery speech that made Craig squirm and his bearer whispered, "Don't blame you. He can sure talk."

"... and now we can all go outside the shield at will. The two-hundred-year wait is over. Earth's surface is ours again. Today is Exit Day!"

There was tumultuous cheering. Women cried. Men blew their noses. Banners waved. And—

Not a person went Out . . .

Craig had felt the reluctance. It had weighed like a living thing upon the populace. It had pushed into their hearts and brains, and sent their blood pounding, and their limbs trembling. It had made them redden. And made them pale. It was sweat. It was dry-mouths. It was bitten lips. It was astride every man, every woman, every child that day.

It was Fear!

Men looked at one another, and each man's gaze fell be-

fore his neighbor's. They began to slink away, slowly, breaking off at the outer fringes, each one to his own quarters.

"Tomorrow," they muttered. "Tomorrow we'll go out."

Tomorrow became tomorrow, then yesterday, then many yesterdays, then years. Thirty years. And still no one had gone out, though the locks were not closed. Until it became a shrug; "Who wants to go out anyway?" Until it became a tradition, "One just doesn't go out." Until it became a taboo; "*No one goes Out!*"

But yesterday Craig *had* gone out. And, because of that, he walked now in the midst of the crowd. And he was apart.

And proud. And wearing a black and tan uniform of drabness as though it were Virtue instead of Sin . . .

"Fortune told, Mister Icarus?"

The name jolted him. Also the tone of the soft voice, not jeering, not alarmed, not disapproving. Aware.

It stopped him. He looked at the gypsy. She sat behind a covered table of one of the make-shift booths that had been hastily nailed up along the streets. Many would be earning extra tokens in Car-

nival vendoring. She held out a hand, palm up.

"Your fortune in your palm," she said.

She was young. Only a girl. She had fair hair, like silk ash beneath a gauze kerchief. The barbaric gold pendant that hung at her throat seemed oddly out of place against that slim white loveliness. She *was* lovely. Especially her eyes. Deep and purple and wide with silver flecks. ("Like the open night sky and the luminescence that patterned it.")

And there was a kindness such as he had never seen on any other face.

He took the opposite chair and gave her his hand. She turned it palm up.

"Your grandfather was an Icarus." Craig jumped. He glanced uneasily about. But her voice was soft, for his ears only. "In fact, he was leader of that gallant group who took their name after the mythical youth who ventured to fly to the sun on wings of wax. Your ancestor was a squadron leader in the First Battle of Atom. He was World Flight leader in the Third and last Battle of Atom—thirty days later when half the earth had been destroyed."

Craig tried to pull his hand away. Then realized she was

not looking at his hand. Her eyes were on his face. Coldness chased up his spine. Could she pierce the goggles? Could she see what he really looked like? What was she? From Mental Security?

"I'm only a fortune teller," she reassured, as though discerning his fear.

"Thanks," he rose stiffly, putting his free hand in his pocket for a token. But she did not release his other hand.

"I haven't told you all yet."

"Thanks anyway. I'm in a hurry."

"About your grandfather's death when the populace rose against the Trigger-Men."

Craig grew white. The hated name! "That's unfair," he said hotly, "he only did a job. He was a soldier, under command!"

"Shhhh!"

Her warning stopped the violent words. He sank weakly back into the chair, but his bitterness spilled out: "They killed him. Took him at night from his home. Lynched him along with all the other pilots, and the technicians, and the scientists . . ."

The Peace Revolt.

That's what the modern texts called it. But it was a

bloody, cruel crime against innocent men. The Revolt had been a simultaneous thing, among every nation left on earth. It was blind, instinctive reaction against the Thirty Day War that had changed the face of the world, that had inundated continents, brought new lands heaving up from the depths of the seas, and made old lands untenable because of radioactivity. In thirty days the old way of life was destroyed, topography remade, and population reduced to one-eighth. In frenzied terror, the disorganized populace had become organized in *one* thing—to destroy every vestige of war—the weapons, the men who made the weapons, the men who manned the weapons.

The wearing of service uniforms had been banned. Studies into technological fields had been forbidden. Only the science of mental and physical medicine was approved. Houses were stereotyped, garments were stereotyped. Birth and marriage were rigidly regulated in the sheltered cities. In fear of change the citizenry had voted with fanatic approval the stability of conformity.

"But not you, Mister Ica-

rus," said the fortune teller, "You're in dissent. That's why you went Out."

He broke into a sweat that fogged up the goggles.

"Listen," he pulled away his hand and spoke low and urgent, "A citizen can dress anyway he wants at Carnival time." The psychologists advocated an annual carnival where people could be wild and vulgar, promiscuous and bacchanal; where they could dress or undress as they pleased so they could 'let off steam' in one grand holiday and not rebel against the even tempo of their lives. "People don't have to jump to conclusions at anyone's costume. Mine? It's only for laughs, understand?" Then he shut his mouth over further words because he became aware of a stir, as of light fingers, moving in his brain.

"Mind reading!" he exclaimed and leapt up, knocking the chair backwards. He ran to get lost in the crowd. He let them push him along while he reached under the eye-piece to wipe the mist. His hands were shaking.

A clairvoyant!

She must be from Mental Security. Now a man wasn't even privileged to private thinking. Well, he had done nothing wrong. There was no

law against costumes. There was no law against going out of the city. If it wasn't being done, it wasn't being done *but* it still wasn't a crime. Yet—

People *had* been slaughtered for being different . . .

He was suddenly terribly frightened of being apart. With a frantic leap he scaled the rail from the walk to the mobilpath where the crowd was thick. In seconds he was carried to the fringe of on-lookers at the Circle. But he didn't dare stay on any fringe. He had to be one of a mass.

Pushing and fighting he worked through the press. Helpful nudges and outright shoves flung him to the front rail that separated the people from the midway of floats.

The judges sat at a make-shift stand; five white-wigged, black-gowned men and, at the foot of their podium, a jester-clerk tallied their scores. But the eye was drawn to the silver-frost structure behind them—A twenty-foot, jagged shaped pinnacle resembling a bolt of lightning atop which sat the crowned, enthroned Atom. His glowing scepter was extended at the moment as a blessing for the latest float to stop at the judging stand.

The float was an elaborate

one. It represented an old-time circus and was replete with three-rings and a trapeze swing upon which a shapely girl in tights sat at such an angle that her curves were greatly accentuated. Looking up at the girl, the line of vision encompassed the summit of the Lord of the Carnival.

Atom was a revered figure, a personage chosen from among the medics much as a high priest of old from the clergy. Atom was sacred during the festival. But not alone at Carnival. Increasingly images of Atom were finding niches in peoples' quarters. Atom, the object of modern religion. His throne a sacred site.

At that moment an incredible thing happened.

A figure materialized beside the throne! Out of nothing. Out of nowhere. A man appeared. Or—

Was it a *man*?

Lit by the great blaze from the throne fluorescents the creature stood out in unmistakable detail.

Craig's first thought was, "Brilliant simian costume!"

Hairy body, long-armed, short-legged, accustomed to walking bent-kneed. But there was no mask. And the face was human. Human?

Horns!

Why horns?

"Get down!" someone in the crowd yelled.

"Get down!"

"Take him off!"

"What's he doing there!"

"Call Security!"

The crowd began turning ugly.

Craig felt himself getting sick. Conditioned reflex. In the rare times when a crowd was in temper it brought stark remembrance of a day when he had witnessed the end result of mob fury—murder!

He had been a child. That was during the close of the decade called Reorganization. Reorganization followed the Peace Revolt. Decimated populations had poured all available labor and capital into two things—the completion of domed and underground cities and—Project Synthetic—artificial breeding of human beings. The war had adversely affected all animal reproduction. The fertility count was low—where outright sterility did not prevail.

When a brilliant biochemist Dr. Alec Charney had discovered how to manufacture a reproductive element he named Vitachloracell, mankind had been elated—for a

time. The element, while capable of fighting debilitating illnesses such as arthritis and heart disease, and capable of destroying malignancies could not increase procreativity in humans. Longevity was achieved. Fertility not.

But the possibility of laboratory born humans—LABORNS—was greeted with hope. Every city founded its own Synthetic Center with its cells of manufactured wombs, carefully heated, nourished by arteries whose predominant component was Vitachloracell.

But all failed. No true human was born. Only Mutants. Only Monsters. Freaks.

The people were enraged. They swarmed upon the laboratories, burning, smashing, destroying. Where laboratories had been forwarned they set loose their creations, hoping they could find sanctuary with human agencies. But the citizenry wanted full sacrifice. They began the Hunt. Government property or private. Nothing was inviolate. They shouted slogans. They bore placards:

IT'S US OR THEM!

OUR EARTH OR THEIRS!

ALL LABORNS MUST DIE!

A HUMAN WORLD FOR
HUMANS!

They flushed out the feathered men, the winged women, the limbless, the one-eyed, the orificeless, the beastlike, the fluid beings. And they killed them.

Craig had never been able to forget the day he had been swept up by a mob. He could not remember the start of it, but suddenly they had surged down the street where he'd been playing a solitary game of ball against the house wall. They had carried him along with them.

"What's happening?" he had implored, trying to glimpse what they converged upon.

A shriek tore over the cries of the mob. Craig pushed, wriggled, tunneled with stripling ferocity. A kick in this shin, sharp elbow in that rib. And he came out. Front and center.

In time to see a Laborn die.

This one was twin-headed. A male. Two necks grown out of a chunky body.

One head was dying, torn and scratched and bashed almost featureless. But the other head was beautiful beyond anything Craig had ever seen—gentle, sorrowing eyes, a well formed mouth, straight nose. For a moment it looked straight at the boy. Craig stopped like a stone.

There was no fear in the glance. Only pity. Pity for *those* who beset it. Pity for those who closed in with fists and staves and lengths of iron. Pity? What right had *THAT* to pity him? He—a man—not a—THING!

Craig became one with the trample and frenzy. He became one with the howling and the jumping, the hatred and the passion. He was jostled. He was pushed. He yelled to tear, to grind, to rend—

Oh, the beast! The horror! He would squash it! He would—

Someone caught his arm. He tried to pull away, face hot, body perspired. There was a panting urge, a tempo of rushing blood. Excitement growing within him!

"Craig!" His father's voice. Through the shouting and the madness—his father's voice. Sad as loneliness. Quiet as cool shadows.

Craig felt his fever ebb. He let himself be led. The tumult fell behind them.

"Dad?" he said. The heat and the trembling grew less.

"That was how they killed my father," soft words, without passion.

And Craig got sick, retching filthy sick. As sick as he was becoming now, feeling

the tenor of the crowd change to cruel, ruthless rage.

He gripped the rail with white hands. Desperately he wished himself out—home. But the mob held him tight and his eyes could not leave the second figure at the throne.

A black uniformed man with the scarlet armband of the Mental Police started grimly up the steps on the right. The intruder saw the guard and scrambled in the opposite direction, toward the steps at the left.

The descent was shambling—a swinging gait—*like a real anthropoid*.

Shocked silence descended upon the crowd. Then—simultaneous realization—

"LABORN!" The cry came from a dozen throats.

Dead silence followed. Paralysis gripped all.

But not Craig. He leapt the rail. Raced across the confetti-strewn midway just as the apeman reached the base of the lightning column.

"Run!" Craig shouted. "Run for the float!"

Without hesitation the apeman hurtled the judge's stand and landed agily beside Craig, sprinting for the float. In seconds they were on its platform.

Craig shot a quick glance ahead. They had a clear path, straight ahead, about a hundred yards to the flat-roofed Medical Center which stood before them.

Craig dove at a tumbling juggler in the first ring and flung him off the float. The apeman lifted the stunned ring-master, frozen with whistle to lips and whip in hand. Easily he lowered him over the side. Only the girl on the ladder and the float driver were left, and when the driver glanced over his shoulder and saw what was happening he gave a yell and jumped, to land on all-fours in the motor lane. Craig rushed into the vacant seat, setting the car into fastest gear.

The crowd howled. They surged. Over and under the guard-rail. With all their anger Craig noticed, in tight-lipped satisfaction, none were mad enough to dart in front of the speeding behemoth. Those who were nearest the building toward which he headed, seeing the purposeful bearing, scattered, squealing. The way was clear when Craig smashed into the flimsy railing of the pedestrian mobilway, and stopped the vehicle dead against the building.

"Up the ladder," he commanded.

The apeman moved fast. He scrambled up, seized the trapeze lovely, deposited her, despite her struggles and screams, onto the floor of the car. Then with strong arms, he swung the ladder against the building and motioned Craig up. Craig climbed fast. Already people were swarming up the sides of the float.

He halted in panic. The ladder was four feet short of the roof!

His companion caught the rungs beside Craig. Seeing the problem he snaked an incredibly powerful arm about Craig and leapt up . . .

Craig's breath stopped. But the Laborn's measure was sure—and perfect. They cleared the narrow parapet and rolled safely to the flat roof.

Craig breathed deeply and looked across the skyline of towers and minarets. He almost wept with despair. He had always loved the Circle because the administration buildings were the only structures in the city with diversity of design. Always he had hurried to work past row upon row of two-story housing developments each with its precise park area, and viewed with relief the gov-

ernment area where buildings were not merely functional, but decorative. The Administration Office had an alabaster domed roof reminiscent of the ancient Taj Mahal; and the Archives Building was a terraced edifice of colored pink stone, like rose quartz.

The Archives Building. Their only hope. Craig was employed in History Section, and the roof ramp lock was tuned to his personality pattern. It would open for him without difficulty.

But, between them and the escape of Archives, was the many-steepled Sanitation & Water Regulation Bureau. Bitterly Craig eyed it, wondering how he could ever have thought it beautiful. Its spires were spikes to impale him. Its fretwork was a net to ensnare him.

He caught a glint of light. Lantern shine on the alloyed bodies of flycars rising from the roof of Security. He groaned.

"The Archives," he pointed a shaking finger in that direction, "if we could make that building we might have a chance."

They ran to the edge of the Medical Center roof. It was several feet to the narrow out-jutting base of S&WRB roof.

To Craig it looked like a chasm.

No man could make that leap.

But the apeman caught Craig with one arm again. Craig clung to the thick furred body, felt it swing . . . closed his eyes . . .

They caught with a lurch that jarred his very teeth. Craig flung both arms, caught the smooth ledge. His fingers started to slip on the smoothness. Below was a thirty-foot drop.

There was a shout from behind. The Security cars had landed on the roof they had just left.

The Laborn released Craig. Helpless fear swept him. He gripped for a nail-breaking hold, dangling, slipping. One finger slid over the ledge, another. Sweated, he could not maintain his grip. His right hand slipped off completely. A scream of horror came to his lips. He heard the crowd below echo the scream. His left hand left the ledge . . .

A grasp like iron caught his wrist, jerked him breathless against the building, pulled inexorably up. Using his feet as a brace Craig walked a step, two, up the wall. With his companion's grip upon him, he caught the

ledge, helped pull himself up, scrambled upon it.

The Laborn had his fingers hooked into the fretwork of the spire. With his other muscular hand he pulled Craig to a standing position on the narrow base. Craig gripped the fretwork with his free hand, feeling almost weak with relief even at this precarious hold of safety.

The mike voice thundered at them: "Halt! Or we'll fire!"

There was no time for rest or thought. The apeman swung to the other side of the spire, dragged Craig behind the spire's protection. Just in time . . .

A bolt of force hit the spot they had just vacated!

"Hold your hands up in surrender and we'll take you off!"

The weapons were not triggered for destruction. But a stun blow would immobilize them. At this height they would topple to death on the ground below.

Again the Laborn caught him about the waist, leapt from spire to spire with bolts sizzling close. But they were almost to the roof of their destination. Out! Over the building. Wingless birds soaring. They landed on the colored flooring of Archives.

Craig slid from his companion's hold. At the lock he placed his hand upon the panel. It registered his impression. A soft click, a faint hum. The roof section slid open revealing the down mobilramp.

Craig pushed the Laborn in and slid quickly behind, as the section began to close again. The ramp carried them down, one flight, two flights. They were in History Section.

It was dark in the building, but light came through the windows from the lanterns, and the arclights of the Circle. Straight for the door marked **EXPLORATION** Craig led the way. This was his office. He and two other men collated the ancient texts, and prepared them for photolab. He went to his locker. There hung the long gray lab-coats worn when they worked with preservatives to keep the old microfilms from cracking and the ancient books from crumbling. He threw one to his companion, and flung another over his clothes. He pulled off his headgear and goggles stowing them in his locker drawer. Over his face he pulled the mouth, nose mask. The Laborn followed suit. Now they looked similar to the much favored med-techs.

Craig went to the window. The crowds were being pushed behind the rails. Thanks to the swinging lanterns which created deceptions in light Security was not too sure which building harbored them. It would be only a matter of moments before things were organized into a disciplined cordon of search. It was minutes then between safety—or capture. They had to move swiftly.

Back to the ramp they fled, to the main floor. Out the back entrance. Stealthily they went down the walk leading to a two-lane mobilwalk. They came out of the shadow of the building, onto the common run. A group of masqueraders were bearing toward them, pulling at the long streamers fluttering from windows.

Craig stood taut.

The merry group waved, threw confetti. Obviously they were unaware of excitement in the Circle. Craig breathed again. Waved back, and swept past.

He glanced at his wrist chron. Only half an hour gone by. Half an hour between citizen and fugitive.

Down the criss-cross lanes, till they reached Craig's quarters. He put his hand on the entrance section. It slid open.

He and the Laborn went through.

For the first time Craig drew a breath, pure, shaky relief. He was covered with perspiration from head to foot.

He crossed the door beam. Light came on softly.

At the same instant a sharp clear blast from the Public Telecast system cut the air. Craig snapped the "On" dial. The front wall hummed to life. The scene they had left so hurriedly came to life vividly—the judge's grandstand at the foot of the Throne. All faces were uplifted and brought into high or low relief with the swing of lanterns on their invisibly thin wires.

An announcer with a prepared statement was talking: "Regret we must terminate the Carnival at this time. . . ." Disappointed calls sounded from the throng. ". . . to aid in the search for a man abetting a Laborn in an attempt to assassinate Atom."

Assassinate Atom!

Craig spun to the ape-creature. The wonderfully human face registered genuine perplexity. Craig searched for guile. He could find no expression beyond that which ancient artists had imparted to saint. No murderer this.

"Why did you go to the throne? And how did you appear out of nowhere?"

The other shook his head. He seemed unable to account for his materialization. He was wretched because he could not give his friend an explanation.

Craig softened. "What is your name?" he asked, more patiently this time.

"Leon," the other replied.

Craig felt a cold panic. The Laborn had not opened his mouth. His reply had been conveyed by *thought*.

Again a clairvoyant! Again a face of serene benevolence. Beauty of kindness—just like the gypsy girl. Where did the two tie in? Here was an obvious freak. But she had been undeniably human . . .

He became aware of Leon's studying gaze. Damn it, the man was reading his mind.

In irritation Craig forced himself to think of meaningless things—nonsensical verses, nursery rhymes. In a moment he felt a retreat, like the pressure of gauze from his brain, and his thoughts were his own again.

"I beg your pardon," the Laborn apologized with genuine regret, "I did not realize it was an invasion of privacy. I'm so used to sharing

thoughts with the others..." he stopped.

Craig stared at him. His thoughts whirled. Others? What others? Laborns? How could that be? There just were no more Laborns. By Atom, even this one was impossible. All Laborns had been exterminated during the bloody Reorganization.

But no more time was left him for conjecture. His name spoken in loud ringing tones by the announcer whirled him back to immediacy.

". . . Personality Beam tracked this man to Archives. He is a Research man in Histories . . ."

Craig snapped the screen dark.

"Out!" He hustled the Laborn toward the stairs that led to his bedroom and roof. "My flycar may get us to the gate before them. They'd never think to head us off. No one goes out of the city."

In the flycar Craig pulled the plastic hood shut around them. They rose, hovered, and headed straight away. There was little traffic tonight. People wanted to be admired in their costumes along the moblwalks.

Halfway across the city Craig became aware of Security cars in pursuit. Grimly he set course for maximum

speed. With distance closing between them they had still a good quarter mile lead when they reached the gates.

With a sigh of relief Craig grounded the flycar. He leapt from his seat. Leon behind. The gate was wonderful shimmering metal.

But—it was closed!

Shock stopped Craig. Closed!

He ran to the portals. He pulled and he pounded and threw the weight of his body against it. Locked. Irrevocable and unbudging.

He leaned heavily against the traitorous unyielding metal. It was cold against his back, as cold and merciless as the Security cars settling grimly toward him.

Haggard faced he saw the men come out. He was sorry for himself, to lose identity, initiative. Nothing much left after their mental wash. But Leon . . .

"They'll kill you, Leon," he whispered, and turned a sorrowing face to his companion.

Leon was gone!

"What happened to the Laborn?"

The question pounded from a million echoing amplified tiny speakers hidden all through the room, the floors,

the ceiling, the walls, the whole white, unfurnished cell. How long had Craig lain on that floor listening to that question, and having no answer for it?

No brutality was involved with the questioning. They fed him at intervals. He ate and drank all they gave him. There were drugs in the feedings. He knew that. The drugs would make him give them all the information they required. They already knew all his background, knew him better than he knew himself. Even the things he had forgotten, they dredged up from his memory.

He confessed his heritage. The Icarus uniform had been found and burnt they told him in that multiple voice. He shivered, and felt as though they had stripped him naked of individuality and dignity.

"It was a perverted sentiment on your part," they told him while he laid his head against the hard clean floor and wept.

"Where did you hide the Laborn?"

In between all other questions, all other topics, personal, political, sentimental, they thrust this main theme.

But he could not tell them.

After a while they must have believed him.

"Come out." The wall section opened.

He rose. He went out of the interrogation cell and followed a long white narrow corridor. Another wall section opened for him. He went from one wall corridor to another, each direction open to him by an automatic section. Was he ascending or descending? He did not know.

He came to a door that opened into a room. Comfortably furnished in bright plastic upholstery. Behind the highly polished desk was a man. Familiar face that had appeared many times on Telecast.

Bordon, Chief of Mental Security.

The man was big, but not heavy. He had a square face with eyes that saw, analyzed and resolved all in an instant. Not a man to hesitate—nor a man to be deceived.

He smiled at Craig and indicated a chair beside the desk.

"You've told us everything, and correctly too," Bordon spoke in the pleased tone of an employer to an exceptional worker. "It is obvious that you knew nothing of the Laborn previous to that sight of him on Atom's pinnacle. Your action was not premeditated

but a Quixotic gesture inherent with your temperament, and your romantic feelings for past eras."

Craig flushed, but Bordon waved kindly, "I don't mean that in any derogatory sense. Don't forget that your personality grading in school was what earned you your position in Archives. You're happy in your work, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes!"

"That's how we mean it to be. That's why we pay so much attention to our students, so that they can be fitted to a proper labor section. After all, we would have a mighty dissatisfied citizenry if a good mechanic was forced into a mental assignment, or a potential artist routed to engineering. That," Bordon stressed gently, "was the way the old world was run. Small wonder Man was always at war."

The reminder did not escape Craig. Bordon was reopening the dirtier side of history one was apt to forget in the romanticism of books. Craig shifted nervously, but the M. S. Chief went on in his kindly fatherly tone.

"We aren't blaming you for last night's incident. After all," he rose and came round to put his hand on Craig's

shoulder, "a man is what he is and, if you are romantic we must channel your emotions into the proper lane. Isn't that right?"

Craig felt almost a hysterical affection for the compassionate man. He sensed that any time the mood could change to sternness. He could not chance that.

"I—I suppose so."

Bordon went to his desk, opened the top drawer, and removed a folder. "A short personal resume on you," he informed conversationally. "I see you're thirty-seven." He glanced penetratingly at Craig. "You know that next year you will be sent to Genetics for a Marital assignment."

"Yes, I know."

"How do you feel about the prospect of marriage?"

Craig was mildly surprised. "I don't know. I haven't given it much thought. Should I have?"

Bordon shrugged, "Not necessarily yet. Although most young men contemplate marriage eagerly since the pre-marital centers are regulated by schedules." Abruptly he asked, "How do you like premarital sex?"

The question startled Craig. He thought a moment. "Why,

I like it fine. The young ladies are quite thoroughly trained and—"

"—and also the fact that you know they are free of disease takes the worry out. That's another thing the old world didn't have, eh?"

"Well, neither did they regard female promiscuity as a virtue."

"Virtue? That's a strange word to use. We know female desires are as vital as males. What has virtue to do with it? A human is a human."

Craig apologized, "That was an ill chosen word. I—I guess I've been too engrossed in old world mores."

"I'm afraid so. That's why we must bring you drastically back to our own time. My boy, I am going to move your Marital Eligibility up a year. You are to leave this office and report to Genetics Center. You will get your instructions and take your oath of marriage."

Craig was thunderstruck.

Bordon went to the wall section and opened it. "That's all, son."

Like an automaton Craig rose from his seat and moved to the opening. Not only was he free, and absolved of suspicious conspiracy, but he was rewarded as well. It made no sense whatsoever.

"Th-thank you, sir," he croaked as he moved past Bordon.

"Don't mention it," the other replied. Then he paused. "Oh, one other thing."

"Yes?"

"Only a small item. I guess you know that normally a mate is genetically selected for a Marital Eligible. In your case we make an exception. Pictures of every marriageable girl will be flashed upon a screen. You will select the *right* girl yourself."

"The—the *right*—girl?"

"Yes—the girl who told your fortune last night at the Carnival."

The wall section slid noiselessly closed . . .

He was sitting in a square room, darkened so he could clearly see the photo of each girl as it flashed on the screen. He must have looked at hundreds by now.

"This is silly," he told the projection operator, "suppose she was a married woman?"

"Maybe," was the impassive answer, "but don't be impatient. You only have a few hundred to go."

Craig groaned. Another face appeared on the screen. Another.

He sprang up, knocking the chair backward. "That's her!"

"Are you sure?" Something odd in the voice made Craig pause. He looked again at the wide, beautiful eyes that he remembered as purple, flecked with silver . . .

"Oh, yes, I'm sure."

The screen went blank. Normal lighting came on. The operator inserted a film section into a tube and sent it through a chute. After he set his equipment back into closets in the wall he ushered Craig back to Bordon's office and left him alone with the chief.

The big man was standing behind his desk. He leaned on hands that were hard balled fists, and white. All tolerance had been wiped from his face. He looked at Craig with the biting coldness of a deadly rapier.

His voice was equally deadly. "The girl you picked out. Are you sure she was the fortune teller?"

Craig did not understand the other's antagonism. But he too was growing angry with riddles. Angry with these inexplicable changes of mood. What had he done? He had only followed the man's orders.

"Would you rather I had lied to you?" he snapped in irritation.

A bleak stare was his an-

swer. He had the uncomfortable feeling that he had earned the powerful man's hatred because he had *not* lied. Yet what would a lie have gained? The interrogation unit would have soon disclosed the truth. Bordon must realize that himself. Yet his bitterness was unrelaxed.

"I've given you amnesty. What else did you hope to gain?"

"Gain?"

"The girl is my daughter!"

Craig was frozen.

Bordon's eyes bit into his. The M. S. man's expression slowly softened. "You really didn't know," he mused. Abruptly he sat down, depressed a stud and said, "Send Ann to my office."

When she came she was exactly as Craig remembered her. Soft nimbus of hair, eyes like violets, ineffably sweet expression. Her gypsy costume had changed for a light work tunic with plastic girdle that looked like beadwork.

She looked questioningly at her father. Then she saw Craig in the chair, and smiled.

"Do you know this man?" her father said. He was watching them closely.

A mischievous sparkle brought the silver lights to

her eyes. "I told his fortune last night."

"You told many fortunes. Why should you remember him?"

"Because he was different from everybody else. I sensed a warmth, a sympathy and—and desire for horizons—I had thought lost in today's world. And because he was wearing an—" she stopped. Her guileless expression became troubled.

Her father said shortly, "We know what he was wearing."

"Ah, yes. Yes, of course, you would know . . ." Her face was so readable. She had never meant Craig to be in trouble. And he, seeing the utter candor of her, began to laugh at himself. Clairvoyant he had thought her. She was no more clairvoyant than he. So she knew all about him! As her father's assistant she had access to everybody's personal files and photographs. It was easy for her to know about him—or anyone! There was nothing remarkable about it.

He laughed aloud his relief. She flicked a glance at him, studied him a moment, then also chuckled softly. Only Bordon saw no amusement. His face was bland, almost careless. Yet Craig

knew he missed no intonation, no flicker of a lash.

"Ann," Bordon said without preliminary, "this is the man I have chosen for you to marry. You will both go immediately to Genetics for preliminary testing and filing of intent. I am sure there will not be any difficulties in the way." The underlying meaning was that Bordon would make sure.

His daughter showed neither surprise, anticipation or negation. Like all young folks she had been rigorously brought up in the knowledge that if a girl had not filed intent before age thirty-five a mate would be designated for her. At that point it struck Craig that this girl who looked seventeen at most, must be thirty-five—or older—

Genetics Center was a white building. The domed main lobby was cool with many doors leading to inner rooms. The reception desk, a synthetic white marble with black graining, was at the far side. A calm voiced medic worker in white tunic and cap gave them preliminary application blanks to be filled out right at the desk. She took the papers when they were done, rolled them and sent them through the chute.

"You can go through those

doors for your physicals," she waved Ann to a door at the left, Craig to one at the right. "The papers will clear through while you're examined."

Craig hesitated, looking to Ann, but the quiet girl had already started for the place assigned her. Craig went to his room.

A young medic told him to strip and lie down on the stretcher-table. Automatic instruments set in the table took his pressure, recorded his metabolism, indicated his weight, height, blood count, type, and other pertinent factors while the medic stood behind a shield adjusting for an over-all X-ray. Finally the medic took a tabulation of Craig's physical picture and sent the tab through the chute. Craig redressed.

When he was permitted to go back to the reception desk Ann was just coming from her examining room. She walked toward him with easy grace. No other woman walked like that.

The lethargy of the fast pile-up of events suddenly dropped from Craig. He felt a rare aliveness.

On impulse he held out his hands. Ann slipped hers into his clasp. She was warm. Her hands were smooth. The nails

were round and beautifully kept.

"Ann," he said with great feeling, "I'm glad I'm to marry you."

Her lips curved with pleasure. But a small uncertain line drew her brows, and he gained a fleeting impression of a bewildered child holding a candy bar but not sure what lay beneath the wrapper . . .

The quarters assigned to them were choice. The building lay on the outskirts of the city, just before the farm and garden section. Their windows looked over orchard groves, and the fragrance of flowers filled the room.

Craig lifted Ann in his arms and carried her over the threshold. When he set her down he smiled a little foolishly. A barbaric, out-moded custom. But he had read about it, and liked the sentiment.

After the preliminaries of examining the room, of exclaiming over the view, he said carelessly, "Think I'll change to something more comfortable."

Their wardrobe had been prepared. Wryly Craig noted that Bordon had forgotten no detail. He showered and donned pajamas and robe and came into the other room.

Ann was standing at the window, looking past the trees to the curving rainbow bowl that shielded the city. She turned at his step, and he saw that her eyes were clouded.

Vague bafflement touched him. He knew all girls went to pre-marital centers but there was something about Ann—an untouched innocence . . . Uneasily he indicated the room he had just left. "All yours," he flipped. And she moved past him as though in a dream.

She was a dream, he thought, when she came to the door later in something shimmering and flowing, and her hair falling loose.

He rose slowly. His throat was choked. He was almost afraid to touch her. She was so beautiful.

"Ann," he husked, "how could this happen to me? How could I be such a lucky man?"

Who was he to have this silver girl? He bent. Her hair was silken on his lips. Her face was like an apricot warmed in the sun. Her mouth moved under his, like a curious child, seeking, trembling, wary.

He gathered her up and placed her on the coverlet among pillows that smelled like flower petals . . . And she

was so soft and pliant against him that his gentleness became urgency. His tenderness became demanding. His lips crushed. His body pressed. His whole being was intent to engulf her . . .

He heard her whisper, "No. NO!" as if in horror.

Then she vanished.

Out of his embrace. Out of his vision. Beyond his ken. Ann was gone . . .

He stared stupidly at the bed, still indented from her presence, his arms about emptiness where warmth still lingered.

What trick? What fool taunt? What diabolique torment?

He sprang about the room, spinning this way and that, seeking out every corner. "Ann," he cried. "Ann!"

He ran into the other room. And the door was burst open. Uniformed men stood there. Ann's father stood there with them.

Craig sprang at him. Snarling, he gripped his tunic. "What filthy game is this? What did you do with her?"

Bordon's men moved menacingly forward but their chief motioned them back. "Leave us," he commanded, and they withdrew, sliding shut the opening.

"Where is Ann?" Craig gritted.

Bordon's eyes were black hot wells. "Not where is Ann," he corrected acidly—"What is Ann!"

Craig's hands slid down, boneless to his side. "What?" he stuttered, "wh-what?"

Bordon pushed him down on the couch. Levelly he regarded him. "Ann is not human," he told her husband. "Ann is a Laborn."

Craig's lips drew back from clenched teeth—an animal tormented. "Go to hell! I don't believe you!"

"At any other time I wouldn't care whether you believed or not. Now your belief is important. It happens to be true that Ann was artificially conceived." He paced to the window, looked across the quiet town, came back, walking like an animal on padded muscled feet. A strong man in his prime of ninety years.

"Dr. Charney was a friend of mine," he said. "I was instrumental in pushing through subsidy of Project Synthetic. The primary lab was here—right in this city. I tried to keep all progress top secret. But there was too much emotional appeal, too much human involvement. There were bound to be leaks.

Every failure stung people personally. The grand crop of failures was too much for them. Even I could not halt the insurrection without being butchered myself. Once I tried to tell them there had been some successes. That was the closest I came to loss of office and execution. After that I said no more."

Again he paced, his face hard with dark memories. "They blew up the Project. All key personnel were lost—they thought. But I had smuggled Charney out—along with some embryos he was certain would be normal. He was right on two counts. Two began to develop as normal babies. One was a male we called Everett. The other was Ann . . .

"With manipulation I was able to make it appear the female infant had been born to my wife. But two babies would have been suspect. There was only one thing I could do. I drugged the doctor and placed him in a flycar with the infant boy, set the automatic controls for Outside."

A prickle of horror coursed through Craig. He could imagine how Charney must have felt upon reviving outside the 'safe' confines of the

bowl. For an agoraphobic it must have been agonizing.

"I don't know what happened to them," Bordon continued pensively. "Perhaps they did not survive. But once they were Out my concern was for Ann. I watched her development. For years I studied everything she did, watching for some abnormality. There was nothing I could detect. She was a wonderful child. I grew to love her as though she were my natural daughter. In time I was almost able to forget what she really was, but every now and then certain things would happen, and I was forced to remember . . ."

"Certain things?"

"She was much like a child. Although her I. Q. was incredibly higher than children her age, she was more immature in many ways. Her sexual age was sub-level. She knew about the pre-marital centers but she would never participate."

A thrill of elation shot through Craig. His feelings about Ann's unfeigned innocence had been correct.

Guessing the trend of Craig's thoughts Bordon shot him a humorless smile. "But you see, that was exactly why she must have vanished."

"I don't understand."

"Just a crazy theory that's been plaguing me for years. I think Ann has an incredible life span—maybe a thousand years—"

"You're crazy!"

". . . perhaps more. Ann's actual age is thirty-eight, but I suspect her sexual age to be around eight or ten. In another thirty to fifty years she may reach the psychological level we call adolescence . . . That was why, when you opened your mind to her, revealing your emotions she, being a clairvoyant, moved deeper, beneath your conscious thoughts to your baser desires. She saw with a child's eyes what you thought with an adult's mind. And what she saw was too much for her."

Craig's slow realization of what this man was trying to tell him was pitiful. Consummation of his marriage would have been tantamount to rape of a minor.

". . . she did what any child in danger of violation would do. She ran in blind, unreasoning terror. She escaped by the only means in her power—a means, I am convinced, of which she herself was not aware. It was automatic, made possible by fear—she *teleported*."

"But Ann was able to read

minds! She must have known what marriage entailed!"

"Only objectively. Like a child watching a fairytale. Only this time—when the Ogre stepped out of character, off the stage into real life—it took on believable, terrifying status."

"You knew this? And you let her marry me?"

"I was working on hunches. Marriage was the only way I could get proof. This room was wired. Don't look so indignant. I wasn't sure what would happen. I had to experiment. Ann's basic integrity never allowed her to misuse her power to read minds. She would not pry. When she did so in your case Carnival night I realized you had some kind of affinity which no other man ever had for her—"

Suspicion rang in Craig's mind: "You think I am Everett?"

"I don't know. I think you are human. Yet you are different enough to make me wonder. You can go Outside. You're the only man I know who can do that. I must trust you to go Outside and find Ann and Dr. Charney—perhaps even the true Everett—and bring them In."

"How do you know I'll come back if you let me go?"

"I have to chance that you're a true human. The fate of all humans rests with you." Bordon's voice did not rise, yet his words seemed like a shout. "Last year only five births were recorded. This year there has not been a single birth. We've gotten the same report from every city on Earth. *Man is Dying!*"

The air was like wine. The hard packed path beneath Craig's feet was a natural road between the swell of hills. Grass was only a stubble in tentative patches, and where the wind carried the seed of trees they were mere striplings. Earth was slowly beginning to regenerate over the scar tissue.

Craig had been walking for an hour. He had left the flycar a mile beyond the Exit locks. He did not want to fly when there was real ground to tread. For the first part of his walk he had been too enthralled with the vast open world to take note of things that impinged on his subconscious. Little by little he became aware. Of the silence. Of feathery fingers tapping his mind. Of unseen eyes . . .

There were Watchers.

Yet Craig felt no fear of Them. Perhaps because he knew who They were. Or per-

haps his desire that they reveal themselves was over and beyond concern for himself.

He noted an ascent where rocks and boulders brooded like well-disciplined sentinels. Here and there a cave made a dark splotch on the face of the rise.

He left the path. He toiled up the slope.

THEY were waiting for him at the first scarp of the hill. Behind them an enormous cave opening from whose depths came the flicker of lights told Craig that this was their convening place. He stopped before Them. There were perhaps a dozen of Them.

They were the shining people.

There emanated from Them an aura of serenity—of quiet power. And it made Them beautiful—even those that mutation had made grotesque. Craig recognized Leon, the simian-man he had befriended, standing between a Cyclops and a Lilliputian.

Only two were completely human in appearance. One was a tall, bronzed magnificent male. The sight of him crushed Craig with disappointment. Up to now he had the faint hope that he himself was Everett. But here beyond a doubt was the missing male

Laborn. And beside him—Ann!

They all stood together in such still ease that Craig knew there was silent communication among Them. It made Them a unit from which Craig felt apart and alone.

Yet they were not unkind to him. They could never be unkind in the cruelest sense of the word. They were tolerant. Their manner was patient—but they were aloof. Aloof, as any superior being could be with an inferior.

Homo superior.

But where was their creator?

Everett answered the unspoken question. "Dr. Charney died a few years ago. He was broken by the exile. His will kept him alive only long enough to set me on my own feet. Then he died."

"Then it is too late," Craig mused, "there will be no more births."

Everett smiled. "There will be. Ann and I can procreate . . . we are 'like' species. Unfortunately," he said regretfully of his companions, "they cannot."

Only Everett and Ann—the future's Adam and Eve . . .

Craig looked at Ann, and his heart went out of him. She was beyond loveliness. And—

beyond mortal man. In her pity Craig realized how completely he had lost her . . .

"Bordon was wrong. You've gained maturity in a day, not in the thirty or fifty years he estimated."

"You were my catalyst," she said softly. "You quickened the change—made me aware of Myself and of my potential."

"And this potential? This new you? Was Bordon right in his surmise?"

"To a great degree. But even Bordon underestimated. We are tomorrow's dominant earth species . . . Man's heirs. But unlike Man we are not earthbound. We can teleport beyond the moon, beyond the planets, beyond the solar system. We can be Earth-free because we are progressive—but not—aggressive!"

Craig understood the play on words. And he was ashamed for all humanity because the rebuff was justified. He faced the creatures who were living testament to the strength of Alliance. Each being as unlike the other as possible—but they were *not* set against *each other*. They shared a brotherhood born of the knowledge that each individual had a contribution to advance the Whole. Therefore they were capable of rising

beyond their home star. Therefore the Universe was free pasture to them, open to their roaming, because they were not wracked nor rent by discord.

Ann bore this out. "We have all 'come awake'—fully. With our combined power we have been able to 'contact' beings beyond Earth." Enraptured she said: "Intelligent life exists all through the galaxies. They have extended to us hospitality should we desire to leave this planet . . ."

"But if you can teleport why didn't you go before this? Why did you let so many Laborns be slaughtered?"

It was Leon who answered in gentle sadness, "We were not aware of ourselves. If you put a human infant among wolf cubs he will grow up thinking himself a wolf. So we—raised among humans—thought ourselves human. To some of us awareness came naturally—with maturity—others—like myself—like Ann—needed 'shock' treatment."

He smiled at Craig's bewilderment. "To me it happened Carnival night. Out here, beyond the dome, I was aware of the gaiety of Carnival. I received such strong mental emanations that I became frantic with desire to

see Lord Atom being extolled that night. In fact, so great was my wish, that I actually teleported myself to the spot without realizing how I got there. When you endangered yourself I became so immersed in the chase there was no time for thought. But when, at the Gate, I stood face to face with the Security Men and read the killing intent in their minds I fervently wished myself back here—and—I was!"

*. . . I wished myself back
. . . and I was . . .*

Simply said. The words that made the difference between Human and Divine. Because I think—therefore I AM!

The real secret of Omnipotence. Not Matter—MIND!

They could soar through space like thinking comets. They could choose this sun to warm themselves or one a million light-years away. They could make love under a double moon—or work where twin stars kept eternal day. They would wing free of Earth. Without jets. Without atomic or solar force.

On thought . . .

Heavily Craig sighed: "So you will leave . . ."

"No!" Everett declared. "We are not leaving. Neither will we wait out the inevitable

tomorrow to come into our inheritance!"

The meaning was clear.

"You plan to wipe out Mankind!"

"Mankind has wiped itself out! We would merely render the mercy shot."

"Mercy shot! You can't vindicate murder!"

Ann was distressed. "But it *would* be merciful. The people won't ever know. It will come suddenly, without pain, on a cloud of sleep inducing gas. Their dreams will be pleasant—and then—nothing!"

"But why—if it will be only a short time in your full lives—why can't you wait it out?"

"Because of you?"

"Me?"

"When we thought man had sealed himself in his future mausoleums we were prepared to wait. But YOU have come Outside the dome. After you there may be others. Perhaps the phobia is wearing off. Perhaps once they are under unshielded atmosphere reproduction will be restored. There are too many possibilities which we dare not chance. And it is not alone our fate as a new species—the future of celestial beings may be involved. Man was unique among higher in-

telligences because of his insatiable desire for conflict and conquest. Had he not dealt himself the death blow who knows what star conquests he might not have achieved—like the Hun—putting to torch the gentle peoples of far-flung worlds!"

Craig mused. He thought down the vista of history. It was true that ruthless and tormented events were the milestones of human endeavor. But also there were the golden deeds, wrought by men and women of courage, with faith, with vision. In the long view Mankind had displayed the bright face of genius . . . He could not concede Everett's right.

"Would you live your eternal lives knowing you had killed an entire race! If we must die, let it be a natural thing—in our own time—not in ignominy, blotted out like a pestilence—"

It choked him, thinking of the heights Man *had* reached, and might *have* reached; the space lanes they could have charted; the stars they might have explored—if—if they had been in accord.

"We're a sick race," he wept, "I'm an oddity. No one else can go Out. No one will even try. We'll die out, no

fear of that being changed. One day there will be some men left. And then a day will come with no men left . . ."

Leon asked softly, "Would you rather be the last man? Or go unawares one night with all your friends—all your loved ones?"

"Whatever my decision it must be mine to make—not yours to decide for me!"

There was no reply.

Craig faced them. Embattled for all Mankind. David against the Shining Giants. His sling and shot? The Certainty of the right of a lost cause. Deliberately Craig made his thoughts clear, like placards, the shining beacons of history—:

The Philosophy of Confucius

The Code of Hammurabi

The Ten Commandments

The Sermon on the Mount

The Magna Carta

The Napoleonic Code

The Bill of Rights—

He won!

"We are leaving Earth! When the World is ready for repopulation we will return."

They said no more.

Craig stood by as they locked hands, became a unit and—vanished.

How silent the world.

He began to walk rapidly, skiddering, almost rolling

down the slope to the easier going of the trail.

Ahead the dome shimmered. He wished he were Inside, out of this Quiet. How had he ever thought the vast arch of sky beautiful? It harbored watching eyes, prying minds. Up there were the pall bearers, waiting for Man to expire so they could fertilize the earth with his bones.

The Dome—so far away—
A mausoleum?

That's what Everett had called it.

What else had he said?
"... perhaps their phobia is wearing off ..." And—he had said: "Perhaps once they are

under . . . atmosphere their reproduction will be restored."

Craig stopped.

What if Man only needed the impetus of desperation to burst the bonds of his own fear? If he knew he would die without air would he not crawl where the air was?

If Bordon knew there was a chance. Bordon, a strong man. Would he not go Out? Wouldn't others?

Slowly Craig began to walk.

"I must tell Bordon," he muttered.

His strides lengthened. Then—he began to run . . .

THE END

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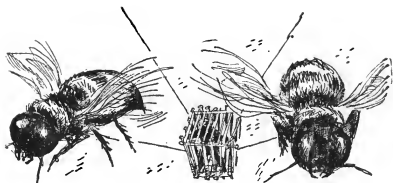
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*He liked to collect oddities from
the ends of the universe. . .
Then he found*

THE IDOL

By A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

NOBODY is so well paid that he'd turn down the chance of making a few extra dollars—and if such dollars are free of tax, so much the better. Geore Manning was no exception to the general rule. He had a racket, and a highly

remunerative one, and the additional income derived from it was never shown on his tax returns. He was lucky inasmuch as he had made, through his wife, some excellent contacts. Vera Manning, before her marriage, had

been Vera Lowenstein—and everybody has heard of the firm of Lowenstein and Levine, dealers in *objets d'art* from all over the Galaxy. Manning had met her when she was travelling in the old *Beta Leonis*, of which vessel he was second officer. Old Lowenstein had been pleased rather than otherwise to acquire a spaceman as a son-in-law, and it had not been long before a mutually advantageous arrangement had been worked out.

Manning told me all about it one evening, ship's time, when we were both of us off watch. I had expressed amazement that second mate's pay—and a married second mate at that—could run to such luxuries as the expensive microfilm projector, the private library of all the latest films and the liquor cabinet stocked with exotic wines and spirits that, even duty free, were well beyond the financial reach of the average ship's officer. Manning was ready to talk, having partaken freely of his own Vegan Dragon's Blood, which looks like a red wine but tastes like a superlatively smooth and potent Scotch whiskey with a hint of very dry Curacao. He was in a mood in which he

just had to tell somebody how clever he was. We were old shipmates and he knew that he could trust me.

He said, "I like all this, Bill. I like to do my spacefaring in comfort, like a civilized man—but there's one thing that I like even more."

"And what's that?" I asked.

"Doing the Income Tax sharks in the eye," he replied. "The way I'm making money now I should be working six months of the year for nothing."

"The Commission doesn't pay that well," I said. "In fact, the Commission doesn't pay well. Period."

"Who was talking about pay? But if I paid full tax on my makings I could never afford to live the way I do. Moral: If you make money, make it in such a way that the tax collector can't get his filthy paws on it."

"Risky," I told him. "Damned risky. If they get you—*when* they get you—they'll put the boot in."

He laughed. He had one of those lean, long, dark faces to which laughter comes seldom, on which laughter is all the more striking. He said, "If, not when, Bill. And it's a big if. I behave with scrupulous legality." He opened his liquor cabinet, took out two more

bulbs of the fabulously expensive Dragon's Blood, tossed one to me. He waited until we had both moistened our throats, then went on. "This is the way of it. I love my wife. Every voyage I bring her home things that I've picked up on the various planets we call at. I declare them as gifts, pay duty accordingly to the Terran Customs. I take them home to Vera. Sooner or later Vera gets tired of the way in which they clutter up the apartment . . ."

"I'm not surprised," I interrupted. "I'm still wondering what any sane woman could have done with that Altairian *wyzzoth* goad you brought home last trip."

"She did with it what she does with everything else," said Manning. "I love her; she loves her dear old father. She *likes* giving him presents. He likes giving her presents—especially after he's made a good sale. His presents to her are in the form of good, thick hunks of folding money. Then it's not only my wife whom I love dearly. There are all sorts of aunts and uncles and cousins by marriage all over the Galaxy. I bring them presents; they give me presents."

"It's risky," I said again.

"It's not," he averred.

"It's almost time that I was on watch," I told him, looking at his bulkhead clock that, like everything else in his cabin, was of a design and workmanship far superior to anything deemed suitable for the use of its junior officers—or, come to that, its senior officers—by the Interstellar Transport Commission.

"Another Dragon's Blood?"

"No thanks," I said regretfully. "Thanks for the party. See you at midnight."

I unstrapped myself from my chair, pulled myself out into the alleyway and then along to my own cabin, where I got ready for my four-hour spell of duty.

There may be more boring ways of passing the time than standing a watch in the control room of an interstellar ship, but I have yet to hear about them. The trouble is this: Everything is automatic, yet, in the final analysis, the automatic controls cannot be trusted. Nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand you could make a voyage clear across the Galaxy with the control and drive rooms unmanned; the thousandth time the blowing of a single fuse could cause catastrophe. Catastrophe in Space means more

than the destruction of property; it means loss of life. Control rooms, therefore, are manned at all times with officers trained and qualified to cope with the sudden emergency that, in all probability, will never arise.

The fourth officer, as he always did, hurried over his handing over. I, as I always did, refused to accept responsibility until I had checked everything, thereby selfishly extending the period in which I should have somebody to talk to.

The fourth fumed and fretted while I read through the previous entries in the Log, starting at the very top of the page, even the heading, *Starship Delta Orionis, Port Woomera, Terra, to Port Southern, Lorraine (Beta Crucis IV)*. I examined the entries concerning Temporal Precession Rates, the Relative Humidity of the ship's atmosphere, pressures and temperatures. I switched on the Tri-Di Chart and expressed disapproval of the game of three dimensional noughts and crosses that the fourth had been playing with somebody—perhaps the Electronic Radio Officer, perhaps himself—and made him clear the lattice from the tank.

At last I expressed my readiness, albeit reluctantly, to take over. The fourth bade me a surly goodnight and was out of the control room before I had strapped myself into the pilot's chair. I lit a cigarette, looked out of the ports at the rather frightening whorls and spirals of light that are all that one sees from a ship with the Interstellar Drive in operation. I looked away from the port to the faces of the gauges and meters. I looked at nothing at all and listened to the throb of pumps, the whirring of generators, the high whine of the precessing gyroscopes of the Mannschenn Drive.

I thought, inevitably, of what George Manning had told me. It all added up. I had wondered why he, a fairly senior second mate who had succeeded in keeping his nose clean, had asked for a transfer from the *Betty Lion*, with her regular run, to the *Delia O'Ryan*, far smaller (and with her personnel paid accordingly) and little better than a tramp. Now I knew. It all added up nicely. In a *Beta* Class ship, running only to the major ports, there would be small opportunity for picking up alien art treasures at bargain prices. In a *Delta* Class ship, running mainly to

small ports on unimportant, little known planets, a bottle of whiskey or a carton of cigarettes might well purchase something worth thousands of dollars.

I sighed. It was a good racket that George Manning had got himself into. It was a racket in which it was essential to have shoreside contacts, essential to have somebody who could teach one what was good and what wasn't. It was a good racket, and it was safe. The Terran Customs, although vicious in their treatment of smugglers, never charged high duties on declared gifts, and it was highly improbable that they would ever discover Manning's connection with the firm of Lowenstein and Levine. Too, they were on the lookout for such obvious things as drugs and liquor and precious stones and would be inclined to regard works of art as mere curios.

To pass the time, I began to speculate. There would be nothing worth picking up on Lorraine. It was an Earth-type planet, Earth colonized. There had been no intelligent native life at the time of the colonization and the colonists had developed a drably industrial culture. Our next port of call was Port Broonaara, on

Broonaara, one of the outposts of the Shaara Empire. The Shaara, those communistic bumble bees, are not artists. There would be nothing for Manning there. After Broonaara we should call at Cleg, and after Cleg we should make the rounds of Willoughby, New Cheshire, Wittenfels and Dorado. From Dorado we were to proceed to Port Southern, and thence back to Woomera.

Even I, a peasant in such matters, knew that there would be nothing worth picking up on any of those planets.

Even I was wrong.

Having obtained the permission of the Queen-Mother of the local hive we dropped down to Port Broonaara. Broonaara is a pleasant enough world, not too hot, with all of its considerable land surface covered with luxuriously flowering trees and shrubs. It is an ideal world for the Shaara, who find it easy to maintain a colony there and to produce enough honey in excess of their own needs to maintain a flourishing export trade, both to their own home planets and to those colonized by Man.

It was morning, local time,

when we made our landing. Normally we should have begun discharge at once, have completed discharge by noon and commenced loading, blasting off in the evening. But this, we discovered, was not a normal day. The hive, a couple of miles to the west of the spaceport, looked like an active volcano. From the entrance at its top poured a stream of drones and workers, like dense, dark smoke, spiralling up into the clear, yellow sky. The Shaara drone who acted as the Commission's agent told us what was afoot. A new hive was to be established, he said, his voice droning from the diaphragm strapped to his thorax. A new hive was to be established, and what we were privileged to see was the nuptial flight of the new Queen-Mother and her entourage.

It was all very interesting, said the Old Man, but it wasn't getting his ship discharged and loaded.

The Shaara drone replied that he, in his younger days, had been an astronaut and that more than once his ship had been delayed by public holidays on Earth and on various Man-colonized planets. As a drone he saw nothing wrong with holidays, but

Shaara holidays were in honor of something happening *now*, not something that happened centuries ago. Even so, a holiday was a holiday . . .

The Old Man took the hint and asked him up to his cabin to partake of something in honor of the occasion. When they had left the officers' lounge Manning approached the chief officer.

"After all, sir," he said, "a holiday is a holiday, and the Guild ruling is that, whenever possible, local holidays shall be observed by the personnel of starships . . ."

"Oh, all right," said the mate. "Anybody who wants to go ashore can go ashore. A few drones extra cavorting over the surface of this glorified hothouse won't be noticed."

"Care to stretch your legs?" Manning asked me.

"Might as well," I told him.

We went to our rooms to get changed into our lightest clothing. We met in the alleyway, were joined there by Peter Carson, our Psionic Radio Officer. This did not please George. He disliked telepaths in general and Carson in particular. I didn't mind Carson myself. He was a harmless little man—rotund, almost bald, looking as though he should have been sucking

the nipple of a feeding bottle instead of the cigar that was always in his mouth.

"Mind if I join you?" he asked. "I could do with some exercise, and all that the others want to do is to get their heads down . . ."

"By all means," I said, before George Manning could make a rude, negative reply, as he was about to do.

George grunted. He led the way down to the airlock and the ramp at a speed that was indicative of his bad temper. Once out of the ship he strode over the scarred concrete of the apron as though he were in a hurry to keep an important appointment. By the time we reached the blue turf at the spaceport limits Carson was perspiring profusely.

"What's the big hurry, George?" I demanded.

"None," he snapped.

"What do you hope to find?" I asked.

"Don't you people ever read the Pilot Books?" he countered.

"Of course," I replied. "Broonaara, Fourth Planet of Delta Eridani. Mass 0.9. Atmospheric pressure at sea level 1010 millibars. Mean temperature at Equator 50° Centigrade . . ."

"What about the history of the place?" he pressed.

"It's one of the worlds of the Shaara Empire," I said.

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Then you didn't read the book properly. There's supposed to have been a humanoid race here once. Probably the Shaara bumped 'em off—although they swear they didn't. Not that it much matters—our record insofar as the treatment of non-humanoid aborigines is concerned has some black patches . . ."

"So?"

"So they may have left artifacts." He turned to Carson. "Now you're here you might as well make yourself useful. Broadcast the thought of whiskey, bottles and bottles of whiskey, as strongly as you can."

"I'll try," said Carson.

His baby face puckered with the effort. George and I looked away from him to the yellow sky, to the swarms of spiralling black dots. We saw, at last, two of them detach themselves from the complicated aerial dance, fly in a dead straight line to where we were standing.

It was two of the drones. They came in gracefully, marred the beauty of their performance by a clumsy landing. They stood there

looking at us with their big, faceted eyes, rather handsome creatures with their black and scarlet striped bodies, their shimmering wings.

"Earthmen," said one in his buzzing, artificial voice. "Whiskey?"

"Yes," replied George. "Whiskey. Lots of whiskey. But you must pay for it."

"What do you want?" asked the drone.

"The people who were on this world before you. The people like us. Did they leave any ruins?"

He had some trouble getting the idea across, finally had to enlist the aid of Carson. The Shaara are telepathic, although not spectacularly so. We learned eventually that there were ruins, and that they were two hours' flight from the spaceport. Manning's face fell. To walk that distance, and most of it through thick jungle, would be impossible in the limited time that we had at our disposal.

The Shaara drones, however, are inclined to let their fondness for human intoxicants outweigh their dislike for work—and, in this case, the real labor was being done by workers. One of them flew

off and up, back to the hive. After a short delay he was back, and with him were a dozen of the big, drab workers. Each quartet of the workers was harnessed to a light but quite commodious cage, woven from the stems of some plant not unlike the Terran bamboo.

Not too happily we clambered into the cages. The ride itself was not too uncomfortable, however, once we had got used to the slight swaying motion. We went swinging low over the forest, over the blue trees with their gaudy yellow and scarlet blossoms, breathing deeply of the heady scents that drifted up through the warm air. We could shout to each other above the hum of the wings of the Shaara workers, and at first we did so. For most of the journey, though, we were silent—and I, for one, was almost asleep when my basket grounded gently on the springy turf in the center of a clearing.

Dazedly, I tumbled out to the ground, saw that Manning and Carson were doing likewise. I looked around me, did not see at first the ruins, moss covered as they were, overgrown with flowering creepers, their stones split by upthrusting trees.

How old they were I cannot

say. A thousand years might well be a conservative estimate. Two thousand? Ten thousand? But that elder race had built well. The huge, truncated pyramid still retained its shape in spite of the ravages of time, of Nature.

There was a door in the sloping side, overgrown, impassable. This the Shaara workers, unharnessed from the baskets, attacked with claws and mandibles, cleared in a surprisingly short time. We peered at the dark entrance dubiously.

"This was, I think, a temple," whispered Carson. "There are forces there still, dormant, needing only a worshipper to reawaken them..."

"Shut up!" snapped Manning. Then, "Damn it! I should have brought a torch!"

One of the two drones went to a nearby flowering bush, snapped off three huge, fleshy, yellow blossoms, handed one to each of us. George and I took ours automatically, then looked at them dubiously.

"Very touching," said George at last. "But we didn't come here to pick daisies."

"Light," said the drone. "Light."

We did not doubt him. We had come across far stranger things on other worlds. We advanced cautiously through

the gloomy doorway and found that the blooms, once in the darkness, shed a pale, sickly illumination, enough for us to pick our way over the cracked flags of the floor.

The air was dry and musty and smelled of age and decay. Things rustled away from our advancing feet. Something large, seen only vaguely, flapped noisily around us, uttering shrill, almost super-sonic cries. Something whined softly and something else hissed.

I don't know which of us saw the statue first; it seemed that the three of us cried out simultaneously. It shimmered wanly in the feeble light, a shape as tall as a man, man-like in form. We approached it carefully, saw dimly that its body was almost formless, suggested a human shape rather than stated it. Only the hands, the outstretched hands, the eloquent hands had been fashioned in detail. Six fingered they were, but this was not obvious. They were hands, and they were the work of an artist who had spent his life striving to achieve perfection in their portrayal.

I heard Manning draw a sharp breath. I knew what he was thinking. I knew that

those hands represented to him a small, or even a large fortune.

"If we can get this thing out of here . . ." he whispered.

We could, and we did. The base of the statue was not anchored, and the statue itself—we later discovered that it was made of aluminium—was not heavy, was no heavier than a man would have been. Slowly, carefully, George and I carried it out into the ruddy sunlight while Carson lit our way with the luminous flowers.

When we could see it better we were not disappointed. Featureless though the body and head were, they had a certain strength. But nobody was going to look for long, if at all, at head and body when those hands were there to be stared at.

"I don't know who they were, or what they were," I said at last. "But they showed rather more sense in their depiction of their god than some of our religious artists . . . Sure, they made God in their own image—but don't we all? Those hands . . . The way I see it, they deified Man the artist, Man the builder, Man the craftsman . . ."

"No," said Carson earnestly. "No, Bill. The way, I *feel*

it, it wasn't that at all. They . . ."

"Shut up!" Manning told him rudely. "The main thing to worry about is getting this idol, if that's what it was, back to the ship . . . The trouble is that it weighs as much as any one of us. How much can these workers carry?"

The Shaara drones, who obviously thought that we were quite mad, were drawn into the discussion. They told us that one Earthman, or the equivalent, was the limit of the carrying capacity of four workers. The workers, who obviously couldn't think at all, stood patiently by whilst the matter was threshed out.

Manning decided that he, I and the idol should be flown back to the ship at once and that Peter Carson—who, after all, had come along uninvited—should wait by the temple until four of the workers returned for him. I said that it would be better if all three of us returned to the spaceport together, sending one of the drones and a carrying party back for the idol. It was Carson who settled the argument, saying that he would be quite happy to wait and that he found the atmosphere of the temple intensely interesting. Manning said that this suited him,

adding spitefully that Carson would have to pay his own fare—a bottle of whiskey each way—there and back.

The little telepath flushed, but said nothing. When we lifted from the clearing he was sitting on the turf, his back to one of the weathered stones, his eyes shut and what we called his receptive expression on his chubby face.

The captain and the mate were not at all pleased when we returned without Carson; after all, to leave a shipmate alone on an alien planet is one of *the* crimes. Manning tried to make a joke of it, pointing out that it was like one of those brain twisting puzzles in which a man, with only one boat at his disposal and with a goose and a fox in his charge has to cross a river and is hampered by the fact that his waterborne transport has not the lift to carry all three beings without sinking. The Old Man did not think that it was at all funny, neither did the chief officer. They made George promise to pay the Shaara drones and workers a handsome bonus in whiskey if they returned with Carson within three hours, then punished him further by making savage fun of his acquisition.

"At least it's useful," said the mate. "It will make a fine hall stand. It will hold three hats—one on its ugly head and two on each hand . . ."

"Satan soon finds mischief for idol hands to do," said the Old Man gravely.

"They're beautiful hands," protested Manning.

"They're ugly," said the mate. "The whole damned thing is ugly. I wouldn't give it house room, not even as a hall stand."

Manning lost his temper then, and said nastily that gold-braided epaulettes do not make one an authority on art. The mate lost *his* temper and said that an alleged knowledge of art does not make one an efficient spaceman. The Old Man said that Mr. Manning would have ample opportunity to learn to become such during the vessel's stay on Cleg, Willoughby, New Cheshire, Wittenfels and Dorado, because there would be no shore leave for him on any of those planets. Neither would there be any shore leave, he added, for Mr. Templeton. Mr. Templeton—myself—was rather peeved on learning this but had enough sense to say nothing.

They let us go then and we carried the idol into the ship and up to Manning's cabin,

lashing it securely in a corner. We had a few drinks then, and Manning unburdened his soul on the subject of brassbound peasants and snooping teacup readers who tagged along uninvited and got their betters into trouble.

By the time that Carson did return to the ship George had worked up a fine hate against him, and for all the rest of the voyage refused to talk to him. Carson in his turn sulked, and refused to talk to either of us.

It was all very childish, especially since he made it quite obvious that he had something important to tell us.

At last came the day when we dropped down from the blue sky of Earth, down to the familiar drabness of the South Australian desert, to Port Woomera. On flaring jets we fell slowly to our berth, touched gently. The airlock doors sighed open, the ramp extended itself to the apron. The usual horde of officials climbed up it into the ship.

The Customs were there, of course. (They always are.) They did a busy trade, handing out receipts for duty and purchase tax on the various curios, most of them cheap

and trashy, brought in by crew members. Carson and I were standing in the alleyway when one of the Customs officers went into Manning's room. The door was open, and we could see the second mate showing the idol to him for inspection.

"And how much did you pay for that, Mr. Manning?" the official asked.

"All in all," said George truthfully, "a dozen bottles of whiskey—but they were actually for transportation to the ruined temple where we found it."

"Yes," whispered Carson to me. "The temple . . ." (We were on speaking terms again; the conclusion of a voyage usually brings about an end to enmities.) "I learned a lot when you left me there. After all the millennia the thoughts of the worshippers were verily still quite strong . . ."

"What were they?" I asked.

"They could," he said, "be roughly translated as 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's . . .'"

"But that's from *our* Bible."

"But it's not the basis of any of our religions . . ."

"Those hands," the Customs officer was saying.

"They *have* something. They *mean* something . . ."

He put out one of his own to one of the hands of the idol.

"Oh," whispered Carson. "Oh. The touch of a worshipper, a true worshipper . . ."

"But what . . .?" I began.

"Can't you see? The power is still there, but dormant, waiting for this . . ."

The Customs officer grasped the idol's hand in his own. Before our eyes the belly of the thing split open, and from it there rained to the deck a scintillating stream of diamonds and rubies and emeralds, of stones that were strange to us and that

shone with rainbow splendor. Manning paled.

He knew, as we knew, that he would pay and pay for his crime of smuggling, that the authorities would never believe the story that he was ignorant of what the idol had contained. He knew that investigations would be made into the state of his personal finances.

He knew then what Carson, given the chance, would have told him—that the hands of the idol did not represent the hands of Man, the Builder, Man, the Artist, Man, the Craftsman.

They were the hands of the Taxgatherer.

THE END





UNSPIRIT

By
WILL
WORTHINGTON

*Is this what man is? Are we the horrors
who brought a great being to agony, who
defiled a beauty and emptied a world?*

IT IS A SAD thing and a strange thing to sit here on my own hill now with all the things of happiness about me, but with this happiness no longer in me. It is gone from me and I know that before it returns I shall have become a

thousand vapors, a piece of earth, a foetid wind, a piece of the sky and finally the sun itself—then a piece of the sky again, a warm rain, a piece of earth, a blade of grass, and then, if not a mouse or a hare, a man again. Not before

I have made this journey will the spirit of the sun abide among my bones again, nor shine in my eyes and touch my visions with color. It is because of my youngest son, whose name I may not speak but whom I shall call—may I be forgiven—Hammer.

My son! I am a man torn. It is my fate that I must own to a great shame in order that I may be rid of a much greater shame in the eyes of my brothers. Shame! It is a thing far worse than shame which steals all colors from my vision now and makes my beer bitter in my mouth, and which makes the flesh of even the youngest of my wives a sickly thing to touch—stone with the slime of corruption upon it, and cold. It would be an easy thing to blame the youngest of my wives for our misfortune, but truth would not be in it; my brothers would not be fooled, nor the Good Magician, nor the spirits within and about all things. My youngest wife, whom I shall call Shade because her people are that good stock who come from the Forest-without-an-Edge in the east, is a good woman and being only a female had nothing to say in the matter.

No, the fault is not that of

my son nor of my wife, Shade, nor that of any man or woman or spirit, but it is my own or—for so it is that all tales must begin—that of my ancestors.

I am Arrow-Stone, son of Arrow-Stone of a line of that name which goes back to the Sea-days, and until this bitter day I called myself Sparrow. I tell you my true name now because no person nor any thing nor spirit can harm me more, nor would I care if they did. The first Arrow-Stone, the father of all my grandfathers, was the first of his line to live on the land, for my people came from the Sea and before that, the Sun. He was the mightiest of warriors, as were all his sons and grandsons, and he was a man of such strength that none could doubt that the strength of the Sea still ran in his veins and moved his arms. His back was broad with the breadth of the Sun, and his fingers were of the same stone which contains the Sea. It was he who made the first dwelling-place on the land by lifting a hill with his stone fingers and the strength of his broad back so that the women, the children, the calves and the dogs could have shelter from the cruel winds which had been sent down

from the North to test them.

It was this first Arrow-Stone who went forth alone to do battle with the one-eyed people of the Country-of-No-Trees in the North. He slew them to a man, using no weapon but his stone hands, but he spared all the women for his own purposes. So it is to this day that all their descendants have two eyes and noble noses like that of the grandfather of all my grandfathers.

Now all might have gone well for Arrow-Stone, my ancestor, and for us his descendants had his wondrous loin-strength not failed him on the seventh day after the battle when, in blissful exhaustion he spurned the last of the foreign women. This woman was called Ohraesi by the other women, who hated her because her lust was unquenchable and feared her because she was a witch of the malign sort. The enraged Ohraesi gathered dung of sea-eagles, hair of dead women, scales of sea-dragons and other baleful things and, touching fire to them, she summoned a certain flame called an undralogi, which could take any shape or no shape, and which she sent forth to do injury to my ancestor. This undralogi, be-

coming first a sea-eagle, then a cloud, then a raven, flew ahead along that way through the mountains to the south over which Arrow-Stone would have to pass on his homeward journey. The undralogi found a place on the side of a mountain where the Sun shone and where the land was protected from the angry North-spirits so that heather bloomed and here and there were small trees under which any traveler would be tempted to rest. Near the way where Arrow-Stone would have to pass the undralogi found a great stone, hollow like the palm of a giant's hand, into which water dripped from some hidden spring high in the cliff from which the great hollow stone had fallen. The undralogi took the shape of a raven then and flew about gathering the unopened buds of the heather and dropping them into the hollow of the great stone. Then the undralogi took the shape of a singing bird and perched on the branch of a tree which stood between the path and the hollow stone beneath the cliff, and there it waited for the returning Arrow-Stone. And while it waited the Sun crossed over so that it shone directly upon the heather-buds and the water in

the hollow stone, and soon the smell of the brewing heather buds rose up and caused eagles high upon the cliffs above to sing like foolish sparrows while toads and great black beetles danced wildly about the great hollow stone and the branches of the nearest trees put forth buds long before their season.

When the grandfather of all my grandfathers crossed over the mountains and came to the sunlit slope where the undralogi waited, he saw that the path led downwards and so thought to sleep a little before going further, but then he heard the sweet singing of the undralogi within the breast of the bird and he smelled the sweet madness in the heather-brew, and then a great thirst such as he had never had before drew him to the stone beneath the cliff. He fell upon the heather-beer and he drank of it so deeply that when the undralogi changed before his eyes into a walking flame with evil eyes of no color, he was too bewildered to mark the creature with his two fingers before it could run on flame-feet and disappear into a crack in the cliff above him.

Arrow-Stone fell into a drunken sleep, and in this

sleep he was tormented by hideous dreams in which he saw great red wounds open up on the face of the Earth, and he saw the Sky and the face of the Sun darkened and made sickly by some monstrous creeping miasma. In the sick sky there were no birds and on the pocked and poisoned Earth there was no greenness of grass or of trees and no cattle or other beasts were to be seen anywhere. But the worst that the dream held for Arrow-Stone—that first Arrow-Stone who had never known fear before—were the men and the women of the dream-country. They moved quickly but not swiftly, hastily but without grace of the kind which is seen in a deer or a fighting bull or any swift animal or in a warrior who has trained himself well and is well favored by the spirits and by his ancestors. And they merely hastened and went nowhere. They talked, and their speech was like the hissing of serpents or the morning retching of a man who has drunk too deeply of a bad brew, but not one heard another; they merely talked as the fevered do. And the eyes of the people of the sickened Earth! Their eyes were like the eyes of the undralogi who stood in the shadow of

the cliff and they gave back no color—no color of cherished memory nor of things seen nor of expectation. Their eyes stared, but they were like fires killed by cold rains. It was the first time that Arrow-Stone had known fear, and the dream made him waken with a cry of pain which loosened stones in the cliffs, and he woke with a great burning thirst.

Arrow-Stone went to the hollow stone again and drank deeply of the heather-brew of the undralogi, and at once his head was cleared—or so it seemed to him—and so happy was he to find himself alive on the green Earth that he drank off the last of the brew. And when he shouted in joy, stones toppled from the tops of mountains, and when he broke wind, birds started from trees for a distance of two-day's running.

Arrow-Stone was the mightiest of men, and that strength was passed along to his descendants—I say this without shame—but since that fateful day the line of Arrow-Stone has been tainted with a weakness of drinking and—if I must say it—of boasting. And it was this weakness in me that finally brought the shame and the sorrow upon me and upon all my brothers, but that

was to come after many days of good fighting, of dancing, of woman-hunting, of song and drinking and joyous forgetting.

When my ancestor returned to his people in this Country-of-Round-Hills he sought out the Good Magician who calls himself Acorn, and he told him of his battles, of his dalliance with the one-eyed women of the North (for that Arrow-Stone was a man of great loin-strength and not one to be chilled by petty strangenesses when the heat was in him), of his homeward journey and finally of his drinking of the heather-beer and, after much hesitation and dwelling upon trifles, of his baleful dream, for it was the dream which made him seek out Acorn. Only Acorn of all the brothers could see both sides of time and could read the dream's portent.

Now Acorn the Good Magician nodded and smiled a little when he heard of Arrow-Stone's battles and of his manly performance among the one-eyed women, but when the grandfather of all my grandfathers came to the telling of the flame with eyes of no color and the dream of the wounded earth, the poisoned sky and the soulless people

scurrying upon the sickened Earth like ants whose hill has been kicked open, his eyes widened in horror, his back stiffened like that of a man transfixed with the invisible arrow of great age and his face became like the underside of a fungus. Making the sacred sign of two fingers over Arrow-Stone he said: "It chills my heart to tell you this, oldest of my friends, but you have been crossed by the Unspirit, and this is such a woeful thing that *I* shudder at it and quail before it, with all my lore and all my magic and such wisdom as Time has meted out to me. I do not know how to exorcize the Unspirit, much less how to render it powerless, nor even less how to destroy it. It may be the stuff of destruction itself, and therefore indestructible by men of flesh and blood and spirit such as we are."

"Then what is the Unspirit? It may be that if a Magician cannot fight it a warrior can," said that Arrow-Stone with the gruffness of one who fears. He respected Acorn and feared his wisdom, but such was the nature of my ancestor, and until this time of his whole line, that he would make a great show of courage, and Acorn, knowing this, was not angry, but said:

"The Unspirit is no spirit at all but merely a great emptiness; it is all senseless hunger, all unquenchable lust and thirst, all mad craving. It is need beyond need. It is killing and capturing and destroying for the sake of killing, capturing and destroying, neither to right some wrong, to defend one's lands and chattel, nor even to avenge a friend. It is that joyless need which is Need."

"How may we know of its presence? Whence does it come?" asked Arrow-Stone, now solemn as a boy who awaits his initiation in the evening's chill.

"The Unspirit may be present in many things and even in places. You know that there are certain places which not even the Sun will make warm and bright—certain trees, certain stones. It may abide in a flame, summoned there by means of unspeakable spells which are known to malign witches of the North. It was such a form of the Unspirit which confronted you in the shadow of the cliff where the spring of heather-beer was. The people of that country call such *undralogi*, (Acorn spoke and understood the tongues of all creatures of the Earth and

some not of the Earth, so it was said). But when the awful emptiness takes man-shape . . . Do you know, Arrow-Stone, how the homeland of a man's or of a woman's ancestors may be seen in the eyes? How the eyes of your youngest wife, Star, have in them the darkness of forest pools and the dancing forms of friendly light among forest shadows—the colors of the homeland of her people—and how your own eyes give back the color of the Sea and the fire of the Sun at times? I have told you of this and you have seen it in the eyes of your brothers and of other creatures as well. But think now—mark it well, for it may be your only warning—of the eyes of a stranger which are of no color, which, when you look into them give back only emptiness!"

Arrow-Stone thought as deeply upon this as he dared, but he could think of nothing to say before Acorn went on, his voice now a whisper scarcely louder than the breathing of a hare.

"When you look into the eyes of Star you can see that in the fullness of time she will return and her people will return to the Sun by way of the Forest-of-No-Edge which is

their homeland on this Earth, and likewise in the eyes of such as yourself it can be seen that you shall return by way of the Sea. In the eyes of no color it can be seen . . ."

"That they are the People from Nowhere!" said Arrow-Stone.

"Yes. Those whose eyes are of no color come from that part of the skies where there are no stars—from Nowhere."

Arrow-Stone then delivered himself of a great shout of laughter and said, "So they will return to Nowhere . . . to the dark places of the sky where they can harm no one. Will they not destroy themselves, then? What is there to fear if this is so?"

But Acorn was graver still, and he made the sign of two fingers over Arrow-Stone and intoned, "*Cooking-bowl and Running Water, Great Horned King and Serpent's Daughter!*" This he spoke to the Winds, and then he turned back to Arrow-Stone and said:

"It is true that their final wish will be to destroy themselves and return to Nowhere, but this may not happen before the seasons have come and gone more times than there are leaves on the trees of the Forest-of-No-Edge, and

it may be that they will not finally destroy themselves until they have spoiled, killed, devoured and destroyed all of the other creatures of the Earth—the Good Animals, the Trees and the grasses . . . all of the brothers in whom genuine spirits live. I know this, oldest of my friends, that their ways are terrible and their magic so strange to our purposes and understanding that we may not know of it until it is too late. Their magic is such that their strength becomes our weakness whilst our weakness becomes their strength. So it is with those who have only less - than - nothingness for spirits . . .”

“You babble nonsense like an old woman cursing a snarl of flax-twine,” said Arrow-Stone, growing weary of the gloomy talk.

“So it may be, but heed,” Acorn said, undisturbed by the mockery of Arrow-Stone. “We have only this poor knowledge of mine for our defense. We can at least recognize them. We can mark them by the emptiness in the depths of their eyes, as I have said—that which you have seen in the eyes of the undralogi—and by their speech, if they are many and speak to one another after their fashion.”

“I thought that only men spoke,” said Arrow-Stone.

“So it is believed by all men. But mark this: the speech of the people from nowhere is the only tongue which I cannot understand. It is a tongue in which it is not possible to speak truth and in which all words mean other than what they seem to mean. I know only this about their speech: the word they use for happiness means only the unhappiness of another man; the word for plenty means another's poverty; and they have a word ‘enough’, but no thought to go with it. It is an ugly language and there is no music in it. It sounds like the hissing of serpents and the morning retching of one who has drunk deeply of a bad brew.”

“I, Arrow-Stone, have no fear of words—except of your own, Good Magician. It is nonsense to say that others speak when it is only men who speak. The people of the North made only strange noises like the belching of a bear waking in the spring. How else would we know those of no homeland?”

“What is poison to us does not harm them. Things which offend us and which fill us with sadness attract them as

rotten meat attracts flies and maggots. You know of certain stones with bits of cold fire in them which we may not touch. And you know of the red places which are like the wounds of the Earth in your dream, and you know of the burning and itching of the skin and the deep sickness that overcomes us if we touch that redness which is the Earth flayed. Those from Nowhere are immune to these things and are drawn to the places of the Earth's pain and sorrow. Their ways would be beyond our understanding. Strange in the eyes of true men and a sickness in their hearts . . ."

But that Arrow-Stone, having by then drunk deeply and gained a kind of courage, said, "I will not become a fearful old woman as long as I have my stone fingers and such a wise friend as you, Good Magician."

And saying this he lifted a whole pot of heather-brew to his lips and drank it down without pause, and when afterwards he belched, splinters of bark fell from the trees and the grass rippled as far as the eye could see.

Now this is the truth as it was told to me by that same Acorn, the Good Magician,

for Acorn is a friend of Time and knows both his faces. Time was in some debt to Acorn and so gave him the power to abide so long as he practiced wisdom.

That first Arrow-Stone took many wives and by them had many sons, and at the time of initiation he selected that son who was strongest and most beautiful, and into his ear whispered the name of Arrow-Stone, and that succeeding Arrow-Stone did likewise, as did the son of his choice so that the line of Arrow-Stone was always of the strongest and the most beautiful. And always the Good Magician would look into the eyes of the sons and touch them with the baleful stone and mark them with the red earth to see if a rash of itching would appear on their skins, and only when the affliction did appear, which it always did, would the navel strings of the sons be buried in the dwelling-hut of Arrow-Stone.

So for many generations did the line of Arrow-Stone prosper. The round hills were green in their season and the cattle increased. Fish ran in the streams so that they could be fetched out with the hands, and the hunting was also good. The clan of Arrow-

Stone increased so that many new dwelling hills needed to be made, and the sons were strong and the daughters had fine eyes of many colors. There were battles with other clans—with people from the moor-country and the Sea-cliffs, and there was as much stealing of cattle and of women as there should be, but no more. They were all good battles in which enemies respected one another, and at dusk the fighting would cease so that the men of either camp could sit on their hills and rest, or they could pass the nights in singing of the deeds of their ancestors and in drinking and boasting. At times the enemy camps would have contests of boasting from hilltop to hilltop and at other times, men who would be enemies by day would drink heather-beer from the same pot until the crows announced the coming of day. And so it was until the very prime of my own life. Oh how much more sorrowful is a dead happiness than no happiness at all! It sits like the mouldering corpse of an old friend among the stones of my hut! How clear is the memory of the coming of sorrow among my brothers! Perhaps if I had not been selfish—if I had not denied the name of

Arrow-Stone to son after son by my other wives, waiting always for a son more perfect . . . but now it is useless to think of such things. Now time has turned both his faces from me.

It was on the night following a fine battle with the clan of Birch-Staff. He and his brothers and sons had sought to drive us from a spring of water which had been ours since the Sea-days, and we had to vanquish them. This we did, and I say that it was a good battle for I lost but two sons, both small men of little craft or beauty. After the battle we sat on this hill where I sit now— Oh dead happiness!—and we drank deeply of the heather-beer which the women brought to us. Soon men of the clan of Birch-Staff joined us, and they brought meat and more heather-beer, and there was much boasting and singing. Also many men went running into the woods with many girls, and there was much laughter. Only the Good Magician, Acorn, was silent. Finally he drew me aside, saying in a whisper, "Drinking and boasting are good enough things for a man to do, Arrow-Stone called Sparrow, but beyond sufficiency

there is an evil. It is a weakness I have seen in all your fathers."

But I laughed at Acorn, fool that I was, and I told him that I could drink more than any warrior or any Magician and still stand firm upon the earth. Acorn then turned from me, muttering, but at that moment a stranger stepped from the circle of men about the fire. He wore the pointed hood which is worn by all men in the country of round hills, but through the fumes of my drunkenness and in the dancing light of the fires I could not see his face. I took him to be one of the clan of Birch-Staff.

"Well let us put it to the test, then, you who are called Sparrow. I am a magician. Let us drink until one of us falls."

And so we drank, but I could not see the stranger waver unless I saw the Earth and the Heavens waver too. I was full of my own shouting and laughter then. I did not feel Acorn tugging at my sleeve until he had nearly torn it off, and when he warned me that the stranger was casting covetous eyes upon my wife Shade when she came into the circle of firelight to bring more beer I laughed some more and said,

"What man of the clan of Arrow-Stone refuses a stranger the hospitality of his youngest wife." I did not see the terror on the faces of the brothers when they heard me utter my secret name . . . and before a faceless stranger!

And I scarcely heard Acorn crying into my ear, when finally I succumbed to the great draughts of heather-beer, "Oh oldest of my friends! Did you not see the stranger who fled into the forest with Shade . . . how he laughed the laughter without music. Did you not see his eyes! The Unspirit . . ."

How a man is blinded by the images of his longing, which stand between him and what is. And how much blinder does he become when his vision is shortened with the magic of the heather-brew!

When Shade went away to that hidden glen which is forbidden to men, pride told me that she went to give birth to my son. So blind was I with pride and with heather-beer that I forgot how many times in past days Shade had turned her eyes from me and kept silent. Not even when she returned from the unclean place bearing an infant son, and when I looked into the eyes of the boy and saw only eyes

—no color of memory or of expectation—no not even when Acorn touched the boy with the baleful stone and the red earth and this brought no affliction to his skin—not even then did I see the truth. He was a strong and beautiful child, and pride told me that he was my son.

Acorn came to me one day soon afterwards as I sat on my hill with my clansmen, drinking, making jokes and tossing clods of manure at the women who pounded grass into threads before the huts. Such is the way of forgetfulness.

"You know what you must do, oldest of my friends," he said to me. "This child is not of our kind. No spirit can be seen in his eyes, and even now his laughter has no music in it. He harbors the Unspirit and can bring only sorrow and destruction upon us. He must be destroyed."

"If you so much as look unkindly upon *my* son, you will regret it in your bones, Magician . . ." I said in anger.

"It is not for me to do. A Magician does not kill unless he is of the malign kind. It is you who must do it." And with this Acorn turned his back upon me for the last time, and I was left with the

blindness of my pride, my ignorance and my beer.

Now I see dark meaning in my memories. I remember Hammer as a boy, and how, when Shade told him the story of the hunter who killed a doe with fawn, and of how the spirits had caused the tails of men to wither and drop off by way of punishment for not having behaved as Good Animals, the boy laughed in a cold and terrible way and called Shade a foolish old woman. And I remember how Shade wept in her sleep that night.

When still a boy, Hammer would go to the forbidden places of flayed earth, and he would return with the red stain on his hands and on his clothing. Sometimes he would threaten to touch our skins with the poison, and when we recoiled from him he laughed the cold laugh and called us poor foolish beasts. Beasts we are, but Hammer spoke the word as though there were some shame in it. But not even then would my pride let me see the face of truth.

One night Hammer did not return to the dwelling place at sundown, and when it had become quite dark Shade wept and begged me to go in search of him. In my pity for her I agreed, though a cold-

ness was beginning to grow upon me. I took off my clothes, covered my body with the salve given me by Acorn—that fragrant ointment which enables a man to move through the trees as swiftly and silently as an owl—and I went to a place of wounded earth that I knew of, even as I hoped that I would not find Hammer there. But he was there, and I would that I had not seen what I saw, for even now it sickens me and it makes no sense. He had built a huge, wasteful fire, and the fire was of Oak! In this fire he was cooking stones and lumps of the red earth! I crouched in the darkness and watched as he lifted glowing lumps of the stuff from the fire and then pounded it between stones until . . . ugh! . . . some matter oozed from the lumps of earth, and it was like the corruption from a bad unhealed wound. I was sick upon the ground, and I fled back to the dwelling place and refused to tell Shade what I had seen. In the ears of my memory I could hear Acorn's words: "Their ways would be beyond our understanding . . ." But I was to learn the meaning of this strange nighttime ritual too soon.

One day Hammer told us

that he would go from my dwelling place and fashion a hill of his own nearby. Shade wept, but when I gave him my blessing, making the sign of two fingers over him, I knew that I lied in my heart. I was growing sick of the voice which had no kindness nor laughter nor music in it. Hammer had never sung a song, and it seemed to me that he laughed only when no one else did. My pride did not let me see my own fear of him.

On another day—I forget how many seasons had passed, what with heather-beer and the stupidity of pride and also of age—Hammer returned to my dwelling place, and in a commanding voice—one such as I might use when leading the brothers in battle—he said that he needed wives and cattle. And so far gone in beer and foolishness was I that I was proud of this! Let the clan increase, my heart sang to itself, and I even thought for a moment that I might one day whisper the secret name into the ear of Hammer . . . even though, as I now saw, he resembled me not at all. And I promised him good cattle from my own herd and I promised to speak for him to the fathers of the young women. But Hammer

would have none of this. "We will go now," he said, and he walked off towards the dwelling place of Flint-Cry, my nearest neighbor, and I ran after him like a dog.

"Bring out your young women!" Hammer shouted before the hill of Flint-Cry, and my heart was sick with the shame of this rudeness, but I could do nothing.

"Who calls me in this way?" came the deep voice of Flint-Cry from the entrance-chimney of his hill, and then his hooded head appeared. His eyes were dark with anger and his brows were like two tails of some sacred black animal.

I stood behind my son and could not see what he did, but I saw the face of Flint-Cry change in a way to make the heart sick. Hammer walked towards him holding some object in his hand, and when I stepped to one side to see what it was, I saw that it was a weapon like a long shard of knife-flint but fashioned of some stuff that had fire—the fire of the strange night-ritual—trapped in it. Flint-Cry screamed "No, son of Sparrow! No! Take them . . . take them all, but do not touch me!" And the voice of my old comrade Flint-Cry had be-

come the voice of a frightened woman, and I was sick on my own slippers. If he had not been frightened out of his manhood as it was, Hammer touched him lightly with the pointed thing and Flint-Cry screamed again. I saw a blaze of red on his garment, and then he fell to one side in a faint and Hammer went into his dwelling without having been invited. "Beyond our understanding . . ." echoed in the ears of my memory.

Finally the three daughters of Flint-Cry came out of the hill with Hammer behind them, still holding the pointed weapon of fire before him at the ready. Their weeping was pitiful, and the eldest said, "How shall we go to your dwelling place, Lord Hammer? There is a stream of water to cross and we women cannot cross the stream without a charm—without a magician."

"I have a charm," said Hammer, moving as if to touch one of the frightened girls, "and I am a stronger magician than any you have seen before. And now the cattle, old man," he said turning to me. I made no move to follow.

"Take what you must and go," I said, too sick to quarrel.

I went to my dwelling and there I drank. I drank until I heard the sound of unearthly birds in my ears and until I saw serpents wriggling where no serpents could be—in the emptiness before my eyes. Only once did I look out of my dwelling, and then I saw Hammer driving the three girls and seven of my cows across the stream at the edge of the forest. One of the cows, I then saw through my dimmed eyes, was no cow at all, but my best bull, Thunder—Thunder the prize of my herd and the Horned Patriarch of all herds everywhere. At what sacrifice did I rid myself of that false son!

I lost myself in heather-beer as I had never been lost before—after that terrible day. Only in the evenings did one of my wives help me crawl to the top of my hill, there to drink alone for none of the brothers came to visit me after the humiliation of my old comrade Flint-Cry. Only the sons of my other wives came to me, and they came only to bear bad tidings, it seemed to me. "Have you seen what Hammer does now, Father? Have you seen what terrible thing he does to the Earth?"

"And what could Hammer do to such as the Earth?" I

would say—too sick, too drunk, too miserable to care, and in no way believing.

"He wounds the Earth with a weapon made from a fallen Oak. He flays the Earth—tears the skin from its face, and he steals the life from the heads of certain plants and scatters them there!"

"Go away with your woman's tales!" I would say to them, and I would go back to my pot of heather-beer.

But one day my curiosity drove me from my beer-pot. I felt clearer and stronger than usual, and so decided to take a charm which Acorn had given me so that I could cross the stream and see with my own eyes what Hammer was doing.

Why did I do this? Why did I not content myself with a quiet death, not knowing, not having seen evil?

From the rushes along the stream I looked out and saw that Hammer had indeed flayed the Earth, and the sight of it was more terrible than the sight of a woman's face from which the skin has been torn. But that was not the worst. Oh, no! This ancient fool had to see yet more!

I looked over the stripped Earth but could see Hammer nowhere. He was in his dwelling, perhaps. Then I saw my

favorite bull, Thunder standing strangely still in the shadow of a tree. I moved towards him and clapped my hands—not too loudly. Our old sign of recognition. But Thunder did not throw his head up proudly as he had always done before. Instead he turned his great head slowly and looked at me with dull, dull animal eyes.

And then I saw that cords and straps of leather hung over his back—for what reason I could not guess. A heavy piece of wood, curiously shaped, lay on the ground beside him, and I saw that the skin of his neck was red with sores as from something rubbing. And then I saw the awful mutilation.

"Acorn! Acorn!" I screamed with all the strength left to me. "Acorn, Good Magician, come now and bring a storm and a plague of deadly sickness upon this place.

I fell in a fever of madness and when I awoke I heard Shade's voice.

"Don't you know, old man, that Acorn has been gone for many seasons, far to the South to the country of Black Mountains where men still respect a Magician who can talk to trees and read warnings in the stars.

"He calls himself Merddyn

the Derwydd now, in the tongue of that country. Sleep now, old one."

Sleep! There is but one way for me to sleep now, all my wives and all my sons. There are no more colors in my visions now—or I see all colors run together in the fire of the Sun.

You will go from hill to hill and from hut to hut, and you will fetch all of the heather-beer that you can find and set the pots here before me in my dwelling-hill. You will then roll up great stones before the entrance-chimney of this place and seal it shut forever. You will leave me with my pots of beer, and you will let the fires go out, and you will forget the name of Arrow-Stone forever.

For now I am to become a thousand vapors, a piece of Earth, a piece of the sky and Earth, a piece of the sky.

I shall return to the Sun, and there I shall remain until they have done their worst with the Earth and returned to Nowhere whence they came—those empty-eyed ones who call us witches and beasts and call themselves Human.

Only when they have returned to that part of the sky where there are no stars will I return as a warm rain.

THE END



THOSE WINSLOW GIRLS

By G. L. VANDENBURG

There the girl was, in the shower, without a stitch on her. Was she out of her mind? Absolutely not! Her mind was out of her.

I THOUGHT I was going to get a good rest after I won the Burns-McDevitt case—a fishing trip maybe—but that idea was knocked kite-high by

this girl who lost her body.

The day after the Burns-McDevitt trial was over my phone rang at home. I was tired of answering the damn

thing. I liked being famous, of course, but I was also exhausted.

Another ring.

"Go away," I said. "I'm on vacation!"

Three more rings.

Evidently it was somebody's idea of an endurance test. I surrendered.

"Hello!"

"Samuel Corrigan, please."

The voice was female, demure and unemotional.

"Speaking."

"My name is Joan Winslow. I need your help."

"Sorry, Miss Winslow, I'm on vacation—"

"I know, I read the newspapers, but this happens to be an emergency."

"You don't sound very excited about it."

"It is not healthy for the mind to become excited," came her curt answer.

"Pardon me."

"I will only take three days of your time, Mr. Corrigan—"

"Miss Winslow, I haven't said yes to your request. As a matter of fact I'll have to refuse—"

"Three days of your time," she went on, oblivious to anything I was saying. "And then you may take your vacation."

"Well, that's very kind of you," I replied, gritting my

teeth, "but the fact is I'm trying to recover from a rather tiring case—"

"Your handling of the Burns-McDevitt case is the reason I'm calling you. I believe you're the best man to help me."

She was the most persistent woman I'd ever spoken to. "Now hold on, Miss Winslow—"

"I've already sent you an advance payment—"

"But you don't—"

"A check for ten thousand dollars."

That stopped me. Not the amount but the way she said it, like she'd just bought a nickel's worth of candy at the corner store.

I envisioned the fishing trip again.

"I'd like to help you, Miss Winslow, but—"

"After your job is over there'll be an additional payment of fifteen thousand dollars."

I clutched the edge of my desk. Twenty-five thousand altogether! And this voice had just said something about taking only three days of my time. To make that kind of money in three days I'd have given up a vacation in Shangri-la.

"You've hired yourself a

lawyer, Miss Winslow. What's your problem?"

"I want you to find my body."

"Come again?"

There was a tinge of exasperation in her voice.

"My body is missing. I want you to find it."

"Maybe you better keep the money, Miss Winslow—"

"This is not a joke, if that's what you're thinking. I am without my body and it is imperative that I find it again within the next three days."

I eased a chair under me.

"What makes you think I'll be able to find it?" By this time I was humoring her, naturally realizing there was no ten-thousand-dollar check in the mail.

"Well, I don't know if I can make you understand over the telephone."

"Are you two different people?"

"No, of course not."

"But your body is missing."

"Yes."

"You're right," I continued, "I'll never be able to understand this thing over the phone. So why don't you get a good night's sleep now and drop into my apartment first thing tomorrow morning?"

She agreed to the time and the place. I hung up the phone and for several moments remained at my desk wondering if law school had really been worth it all.

Next morning, the mail was lying in a heap on the rug inside my door. I scooped it up and headed for the elevator.

A push of the elevator button resulted in a faraway buzz. I heard the door slide shut in the basement. I skimmed through the mail while I waited.

The return address on one of the envelopes sent a geyser of warm blood to my cranial section.

Miss Joan Winslow
1104 5th Avenue
New York City

Get a grip on yourself, came an inward warning. There's no check in there. It's silly. Really it is, it's silly! *There is no check in that envelope!!*

"The hell there isn't!" I blurted out loud. I glanced around to make sure I was alone.

I tore open the envelope as though I had five seconds to live. There was the check. Ten thousand dollars. New York Trust Company. Signed, Miss Joan Winslow.

"Ten thousand dollars," I

muttered, "it's crazy . . . this isn't really happening to me. It's crazy."

I staggered back to my apartment. In lieu of the fresh air I took another cold shower. I was spending more time under water than a sandhog.

I had an hour and fifteen minutes left to do nothing but wait and wonder. I was still fidgety. Everything from solitaire to Voltaire had failed to divert me.

I made one last attempt at amusing myself. I placed my hat in the middle of the rug and tried tossing playing cards into it (a pastime I acquired during debating period at law school).

That's when it happened. The voice sprang up out of nowhere.

"A rather silly game you're playing, Mr. Corrigan."

I wheeled around to see who it was.

"Who is it?"

"It is Miss Winslow," said the voice, stiffly. *"Were you expecting someone else?"* It was the same straight-laced female I had spoken with over the phone.

"Where are you?"

"I am here."

There wasn't a soul in the room, except me of course. "Where is here?"

"By the television set."

"The hell you are! I can't see you!"

"I have an intense dislike for profanity, Mr. Corrigan!"

"Well, I'm not so wild about bodyless voices or practical jokers. Why didn't I hear the door open when you came in?"

"It's quite simple. I didn't open the door."

I sprang to the bathroom, opened the door and looked inside. Empty. I checked three closets. Not a soul visible.

"Your astonishment is understandable."

"Thanks a whole bunch!" By this time I was conducting a frantic search along the walls, behind pictures and furniture.

"What are you doing? Stop looking for hidden loudspeakers and please sit down, Mr. Corrigan. I have important business to discuss and not much time in which to discuss it."

I sank into a chair, exhausted. "How can a voice be separated from its body? I'm an intelligent human being. I know better than that!"

"Obviously there are a few things you don't know."

"This isn't one of them!"

"Have you ever met anyone who knows everything there is to know?"

I hauled out a handkerchief and dabbed at my forehead. "No, of course not," I replied. Then I muttered to myself, "There are forces at work trying to prevent you from being a success, Corrigan. It's an organized conspiracy—"

"Mr. Corrigan, stop talking to yourself and listen to me. You say you're intelligent, is that right?"

"Mr. Corrigan, you are able to hear me, is that correct?"

It was the most reluctant concession I'd ever made. "Yes."

"And you are unable to see me, is that also correct?"

"Yes."

"Now watch closely."

The television antenna rose about six inches in the air and came down again. I saw that much clearly.

"Did you see that?"

I gulped. "Uh-huh."

"What is your logical conclusion?"

"I've gone mad."

"Mr. Corrigan," the voice spoke frigidly, *"you are talking to me. I am obviously without what we refer to as a body. Can you deny either of those two facts?"*

On the brink of desperation I replied, "No, I guess I can't."

"Then you accept the fact that I can be here mentally

and your sanity is still intact?"

"I guess so," was my limp answer. I reached out for the neck of the nearest whiskey bottle.

"Good. Let's get down to business."

"Miss Winslow?"

"Yes?"

"Will it bother you if I smoke?"

"No."

"Thank you. Would you care for one? I'd like to keep track of where you are."

"I don't smoke."

"I was afraid of that."

Well, I accepted the fact, temporarily at least, that I was in the presence of a disembodied mind. It was better than admitting I was a candidate for lunatic of the year which I feared.

"Miss Winslow, I am all ears."

"Very well," already she sounded friendlier. *"Four days ago my body left me because of a—"*

"Would I be jumping the gun if I asked you how your body left you?"

"For many years I have been interested in the attainment of ultimate truth. My schooling, reading, studies, all of my experience has been rather unusually channeled."

"Uh-huh." Who was I to disagree?

"I have studied and practiced the principles of Yoga, Confucism, Zoroastrism and Theosophy—"

"Aren't you a little confused by now?"

"That is not funny, Mr. Corrigan! The words came out starched and ironed. 'Just out of curiosity I once went so far as to investigate devil worship.'"

"Just for the hell of it?"

There was an ominous silence. I suddenly felt a chill.

"Are you an habitual punster, Mr. Corrigan? I sincerely hope not. I loathe punsters!"

"Lost my head momentarily," I said with a brave chuckle. "I'm back in control now. Go ahead."

"For the past several months I have been experimenting with the truths and teachings of Buddha."

"You mean all that trance stuff and self-denial—"

"I refer, Mr. Corrigan, to the simple life, the life of contemplation. Quite obviously you are unaware of the value of the contemplation of infinity."

"Quite obviously."

"It is an art practiced by millions of Buddhists every day."

"How does it work? What's the gimmick?"

"The what?"

"The gimmick. The trick. How the hell do you do it?"

"It is not a trick! Contemplation of infinity requires one to sit on the bare floor, legs crossed beneath, head bent and the entire being brought into concentration on one subject."

"Money!" I belted another drink down.

"I chose to give my being over into all encompassing contemplation of a birthmark on my chest."

"Miss Winslow!"

"Kindly be serious, Mr. Corrigan, or I shall have to take my business elsewhere!"

It was no longer a question of disbelieving her. I simply had difficulty taking all of her nonsense seriously. One thing I no longer doubted was the ten thousand dollars. I settled back in my chair again and listened.

"The fact is I began to practice this rite of concentration. I have been practicing it for two months now, every day for four hours."

"And has it disappeared yet?"

"Has what disappeared?"

"The birthmark. Isn't that your punch line?"

With strained patience she said, "*It was not supposed to disappear! I am trying to tell you how my body left me!*"

"And I keep interrupting you, don't I? Forgive me. You may continue."

"*Four days ago I concentrated so intensely I surpassed myself—*"

I wondered if that was anything like being beside yourself.

"—in fact, I believe I surpassed everyone who had ever attempted infinite contemplation before—"

She was beginning to sound like a broken field runner.

"—I became so completely lost in the infinite that I separated myself from my finite being. My soul, my psyche became detached through contemplation of the birthmark. When my four-hour period was ended I came back from my contemplation to find that my body had walked out on me."

"While you were off in infinity?"

"Yes."

My hand automatically went out for the spirit bottle again.

"Needless to say," continued the voice, "*I think it was rather a cheap trick.*"

"My sentiments exactly," said I. "Tell me what makes

you think your body's departure was deliberate?"

"It left a note for me," said the voice, matter of factly.

With that I very nearly heaved myself out the window. I quickly pulled myself together and belted down another shot.

"And I suppose you have this note at home?" I asked, somewhat skeptically.

"No, Mr. Corrigan, you have it."

I did one of the fastest double takes on record.

"I sent it along with the check. You mean you didn't read it?"

I was too stunned to answer. I raced into the bedroom and got the envelope from my coat pocket. Sure enough, along with the check, there was a folded sheet of paper with a typewritten message. In my earlier stupor I had completely overlooked it. I brought it back to the living room.

"I'll be damned!" I exclaimed.

"Please read it, Mr. Corrigan, but remember one thing. Any opinions stated by my body are those of my body and my body alone. I do not subscribe to them!"

"Yes, Miss Winslow," I said weakly, opening the sheet of

paper. By now I was ready to believe anything. If she'd told me she had two bodies and four heads I'd have bought it hook, line and sinker.

I read the note aloud.

DEAR PSYCHE,

I WOULD LIKE TO LAY MY HANDS ON THE MAN WHO COINED THE PHRASE, TWO'S COMPANY AND THREE'S A CROWD! I THINK I WOULD STRANGLE HIM WITH MY BARE HANDS. WHY? THE REASON IS SIMPLE. YOU ARE WITHOUT DOUBT THE NARROWEST MIND IN CREATION! AND IN A NARROW MIND ONE IS COMPANY AND TWO IS A CROWD!

I lowered the note for a moment. "Hey, I like this girl!"

"Please go on, Mr. Corrigan! I'm the one who is paying you."

IT NEVER SEEMS TO OCCUR TO YOU THAT YOUR BODY IS YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL AND YEARNS FOR SOME SEMBLANCE OF EXCITEMENT IN THIS LIFE. WHAT IS A BODY FOR ANYWAY?

"She's got a hell of a point there."

"Mr. Corrigan!"

I read further.

NO ONE CAN IMAGINE HOW
THOSE WINSLOW GIRLS

DISTRESSING IT IS TO A GIRL TO HAVE A MIND THAT CONSIDERS ALL OF LIFE'S PLEASANTRIES TO BE "VULGAR"! YOU AND YOUR FOOLISH MYSTICISM! FORCING ME TO LIVE MOST OF MY LIFE DRAPED IN A BEDSHEET! JUST ONCE BEFORE I DIE I WOULD LIKE TO EXPLOIT WHAT IS UNDER THE BEDSHEET! I WOULD LIKE TO SMOKE AND GO TO THE THEATER AND HAVE A STEAK DINNER AND AN AFTER-DINNER COCKTAIL. BUT NOT YOU! OH, NO, YOU AND YOUR SEARCH FOR TRUTH THROUGH CONTEMPLATION AND THE PREACHINGS OF THE GREAT TEACHER! YOU AND YOUR GOATSMILK AND WATER-CRESS SANDWICHES (THEY'VE KEPT MY FIGURE TRIM BUT DON'T YOU HAVE ANY REGARD FOR MY TASTEBUDS?).

I KNEW THAT SOMEDAY YOU'D TRAVEL JUST A LITTLE TOO FAR IN YOUR INSIPID MENTAL WANDERINGS AND WHEN YOU DID I WAS READY FOR YOU. YOU ARE AWARE OF THE TERMS OF AUNT ABBY'S WILL. YOU MUST BE PRESENT (IN BODY) WHEN THE WILL IS PROBATED THIS COMING FRIDAY. YOU CAN'T DO THAT WITHOUT ME! AND I REFUSE TO COOPERATE JUST SO YOU CAN USE AUNT ABBY'S FORTUNE TO FURTHER YOUR OCCULT WAYS. I WILL RETURN, HOWEVER, IF I CAN BE GUARANTEED THAT YOU WILL CHANGE THOSE WAYS. I MUST

HAVE AN IRONCLAD GUARANTEE, YOU UNDERSTAND. IN WRITING AND NOTARIZED!

IN SPITE OF YOUR PURSUIT OF THE SO-CALLED SIMPLE LIFE YOU HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN AND APPRECIATED THE VALUE OF A DOLLAR. I, ON THE OTHER HAND, AM BEGINNING TO REALIZE THE VALUE OF A DOLLAR IS NOT ALL IT IS CRACKED UP TO BE!

SHOULD YOU DECIDE TO LOCATE ME I WILL BE SOMEWHERE IN NEW YORK. I DON'T KNOW WHERE, BUT THIS MUCH I'M SURE OF: I'LL BE HAVING THE TIME OF MY LIFE!!

YOUR BODY

I folded the note, put it in my pocket and lit a cigarette. I was certain now that I was probably cracking up but, strangely enough, I didn't care anymore. I couldn't suppress an overwhelming desire to meet Miss Winslow in the flesh.

"This Aunt Abby who is mentioned in the note—"

"Aunt Abby died a month ago."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. She was a tyrannical old wretch! I loathed her and she loathed me—"

"But she left you her money, didn't she?"

The voice, for the first time, sounded bitter. "With one

slight condition. If I am not present when the will is probated her entire fortune will be used for the construction and maintenance of a national home for stray cats."

I chuckled over that one. "Your aunt had an ironic sense of humor."

"She was devoid of a sense of humor! The old witch, if I didn't know better I'd swear she and my body had formed a conspiracy!"

"How much did she leave?"

"Eight million dollars."

My head was a vortex of blazing dollar signs. "Eight million bucks! I can understand why you're anxious to be there in person, Miss Winslow."

"It is imperative," said the voice, calmly, "but I have no intention of acceding to the childish demands of my body."

I shrugged. "Personally, I see nothing excessive about the demands your body has made."

"You're not being paid for your opinions," was her stern reply.

"Come now, Miss Winslow, I do think you've behaved in a rather shabby manner toward your body, don't you?"

"I do not! My body has led a clean and healthy life!"

"What good is a clean and

healthy life if it isn't a normal one?"

"What do you know about a normal life?"

"What do I know?" For the first time, since this disembodied psyche had wafted into my room, I was annoyed. "Well, I—I—" I sputtered.

"You're a lawyer," she said distastefully. "You cater to people involved in murder and larceny and divorce and slander, people who are abnormal, people who have never known the simple life, never seen the true way—"

"Miss Winslow."

"What?"

"I don't like you."

"Would you care to give me back my check?"

"I didn't say anything about your money. I said I didn't like you!"

"I didn't think you'd be able to turn down the money."

"Not any more than you can resist eight million dollars, sweetheart!"

At the moment we had something in common. We were both mad as hell!

"That money is rightfully mine! And I am not your sweetheart!" she yelled.

"You bet your life you're not," I shot back. "And stop yelling, Miss Winslow! It isn't healthy for the mind to become excited!"

"You have three days, Mr. Corrigan. If you have not located my body by Five P.M. Friday you will be out the additional fifteen thousand dollars. I expect you'll do your best. After that time I hope I never have anything to do with you again!"

If only I could have seen her I would have strangled her and thought nothing of it. She was unquestionably the most spoiled woman I'd ever met. Of course I hadn't met her, I had only heard her. When I spoke again there was no answer. I called her name. Still no answer. After several uncertain moments I conceded that she had gone as mysteriously as she'd arrived.

I glanced at my watch. It was a little after noon. I didn't have three days at all. Friday, 5 P.M. was my deadline and this was Wednesday. I had just *two* days and almost five hours.

The job wouldn't be easy. New York was full of mindless bodies and a lopsided majority of them were female. When I looked at my watch again it was three o'clock. I had done a heap of thinking and I had half a load on.

Assuming that Miss Winslow's disembodied psyche had arrived home by this time (I

couldn't think of anywhere else she could have gone without catching a cold), I picked up the phone and dialed the number that was printed on her stationery.

She was indeed at home. I explained my immediate reason for calling was to obtain a picture of her. Her body, not her mind.

In her repulsively sedate way she replied that she owned only one picture, taken after graduation from college a little over eight years ago. I advised her to send it to me if I was to know what I was looking for. She agreed to send it by messenger.

I then placed a call to Mortimer J. Brophy, a private detective. I asked him to be at my apartment at 5 P.M.

I took a shower. My third shower of the day. I began to wonder if it was possible to drown standing up.

After the shower I plied myself with black coffee. During this unpleasant process the door buzzer sounded.

I opened the door.

"Poste-haste messenger service," a boy mumbled. "You expecting a messenger with a picture?"

I reached out for it. He took a step backward. Then he timidly offered the manila envelope. He did it like he was

pushing it into a cage full of lions.

After studying it for a while I wasn't sure just how much help the picture of Joan Winslow would be. Somehow I felt the quite attractive young thing in cap and gown wasn't the same girl I'd be searching the city for.

The picture was of a girl with a reserved air about her. Her blonde hair fell in a straight line to her shoulders. There wasn't the slightest semblance of a smile. She looked like anything but the fun loving type. I shuddered at the realization that she looked like her voice sounded—an awful thought!

Brophy arrived promptly at 5 o'clock. He was an ex-Pinkerton man and one of the dandiest gumshoes in the business.

"Brophy, have a seat and fix yourself a drink."

He talked as he poured himself a generous shot of bourbon. "What's on the fire, Sam?"

"I want you to find a body."

"Police know about it?"

"No."

"Sounds risky. Police don't know about somebody getting knocked off—"

"This body is very much

alive and, if I'm not mistaken, kicking."

He poured another generous shot of bourbon. "Good, good, good! It no longer sounds risky. What's the catch?"

"Have you ever encountered a body without its mind?"

"Only about seven or eight thousand times," he finished his second drink. "Most recently there was a girl in Jersey City. She was about as vacant as a parking lot at five in the morning." He winced. Whiskey tasted like water to him so he must have been wincing at the thought of the girl from Jersey City.

"No, I mean a body literally without its mind."

Brophy smiled. "That isn't possible, Sam."

"You're not going to believe this, Brophy, but it is possible! This body happens to be out on the loose somewhere and its mind is somewhere else."

"How do you know that, Sam? Tell me how you know that?"

"Because the mind told me all about it this morning."

"I see. The mind told you, is that what you're trying to say, Sam?"

I didn't care much for his quiet, patronizing tone. "Yes."

He gripped the neck of the

whiskey bottle and cocked it to one side. "You had any of this today, Sam?"

"Now just a minute," I demanded, taking the check out of my pocket. "Look at this check."

The amount on the check caused him to give an appropriate whistle. "Ten thousand clams! That's quite a client!"

"All right, just forget I ever mentioned the mindless body bit." I handed him the picture. "Can you locate this girl by five o'clock tomorrow afternoon at the latest?"

"A college kid!" he exclaimed.

"That was taken eight years ago. You have to find her by five tomorrow, sooner if possible."

He smiled modestly. "You know me, Sam."

After leaving the apartment my first stop was The Circus Bar at the Picadilly. I had a quick drink and gave the place the once over. There were no unescorted women present and no women with more than one man. I had the distinct feeling that, if Miss Winslow was whooping it up in a bar somewhere, she would probably be surrounded by hungry males. The note she had left for her disembodied psyche had given every

indication that she'd be out to make up for lost time.

I left the Picadilly and cabbed it across town to the Ad Lib Room. It was almost empty and quiet. It took only a glance to see there was no one there of any interest to me.

I hit twelve spots before midnight. By then I was ready to use toothpicks to keep my eyes open. I gave up and headed for home.

I drifted through my apartment door and dropped into the first chair I reached. My arms dangled over the side. It seemed like twenty minutes before I mustered up the energy to remove my shoes. The Winslow case was only twelve hours old and already I was sick of it.

The phone rang. I couldn't budge from the chair. I leaned over and picked it up. It was the city's most efficient private eye.

"Sam, I did a lot of checking and I finally came across a girl who answered the description. She was at the Club Monaco—"

"Was it her?" My interest was suddenly recharged.

"When I got there this dame was treating the house. She was surrounded by men, enough for three or four foot-

ball teams, and none of them feeling any pain, believe me—"

"Was it Joan Winslow's body?"

"Aw, now don't start *that* again, Sam!"

"Brophy, what was her name?"

"That's the part I'm not sure of—"

"Didn't you talk to her?"

"I'll say I talked with her. What an experience! She's the coyest dame I ever met."

"Brophy, for Pete's sake, didn't she tell you her name?"

"She wouldn't tell anybody her name. I checked every guy in the place and none of them knew. Sam, she knows my name and she knows about you—"

"What!!"

"I couldn't help it! She didn't take to me at all, so in order to be able to talk to her I showed her a copy of yesterday's paper with your picture in it. I told her you were my boss. She's a real sucker for a good looking man—"

"Brophy, do you *think* you were talking to the right girl?"

"Well, I got one clue which might give us the answer."

"What is it?"

"Does this Winslow dame have a birthmark on her chest?"

"You were supposed to find her, not seduce her, Brophy!!!"

"Don't get jumpy, will you? The damn birthmark shows above her neckline!"

"Where the hell is her neckline?"

"It's low, but it ain't *that* low!"

"Are you still at the Club Monaco?"

"Yes, but the girl is gone."

"Gone! What's the matter with you—"

"Sam, I had to go to the little boy's room—"

"And while you were there the little girl slipped out on you! You're getting old, Brophy!"

I hung up before he could say another word. I couldn't face leaving the apartment again. But time wasn't on my side. Joan Winslow had to be found! I stretched my feet out in front of the chair. I could afford at least another minute or two for relaxation.

The refreshing sound of running water supplied me with the urge to shower again. Splendid idea, I thought. Before venturing back into the heat one more shower would be just the—

SHOWER!! I bolted upright in the chair. I listened. I heard water running. Shower

water! In *my* bathroom! I raced over to the bathroom and tugged at the door. It was locked!

"Who's in my bathroom!"

There was a second of silence. Then came a high falsetto voice sounding mock surprise.

"Who's been in *my* bathroom?"

"Who's in there!" I demanded.

The falsetto voice came back at me. "The Momma bear."

After a deep breath I jumped into the breach.

"Miss Winslow!"

"Oh, you know my name!"

The falsetto was gone from the voice. It was replaced by a sultriness that would have titillated the most barren male imagination.

"Miss Winslow, come out of that bathroom!"

I heard the latch turn. The door handle wriggled. The door swept open. She was standing there, birthmark and all, in a slip that made Salome look like a scullery maid.

"Miss Winslow, get back in that bathroom!"

She waltzed toward me, sashaying her hips.

"You must be Samuel Corrigan! I've heard a lot about you!"

I backed away into the living room. She followed me, her hips still swinging like a pendulum.

"Listen, you'd better put some clothes on!" I covered my eyes with the palm of my hand.

"Oh, dear," she gasped, "is something the matter with your eyes?"

"No, I just can't look at you that way."

"What's wrong with me this way?"

"Nothing's wrong with you that way. There's something wrong with *me* with you that way—oh, for goodness sake, get some clothes on, will you?"

"All right," she sighed. "If you're going to be an old stick-in-the-mud."

"Stick - in - the - mud! Say, what kind of a girl are you anyway!" I uncovered my eyes in time to see her disappear into my bedroom. A moment passed and she was back.

"Zip me up, please."

She turned her back to me. I reached for the zipper. I managed, after several tugs and jerks, to get the dress zipped up. I stayed behind her for a moment, looking over her shoulder. She gave off the warmth of a turbo-jet.

Her skin was fair and peach-colored. Her hair, velvet and golden, fell on bare provocative shoulders. Every curve was the natural enemy of a man's concentration.

"Miss Winslow, may I ask what you are doing in my apartment?"

Her smile could have melted titanium. "Your detective friend, Brophy, showed me your picture in the newspapers. Frankly, Mr. Corrigan, I came to see you about pleasure, not business. But since you seem to be fretting about it, let's get the business out of the way first."

"I'm not fretting—"

"Mr. Corrigan, you're fired!"

My mouth fell open. "I beg your pardon?"

"I said you're fired. You are no longer obligated to reunite the mind and the body of Joan Winslow."

"But—but, I don't understand—"

"Your friend, Brophy, told me you had been hired and paid ten thousand dollars to find me. I assume this deal was engineered by my dispossessed psyche."

"Well—yes—"

"What will happen when you find the check is not good?"

"But it is good—"

"It won't be after I go to the bank tomorrow morning."

I groaned at the realization that she was making a hell of a lot of sense.

"I take it I'm making myself clear, Mr. Corrigan?"

"Oh, you're being lucid as hell. Your psyche operates at a serious disadvantage. It can't be seen. Consequently, it can only transact business through a confidant such as me—or a sucker such as me!"

She offered a sympathetic smile. "Confidant's a much nicer word. Anyway I'm sure you won't continue in that capacity if there is no payment involved, will you?"

"No, I guess not."

"That's nice." She ran her fingers under my lapels. "And now I want to make a confession, Mr. Corrigan."

Her arms slipped around my neck. There was nothing I could do. I'd have had myself committed if I had tried to stop her. "What kind of a confession?"

"Do you believe in fate, Mr. Corrigan?"

"Call me Sam," I said, fighting for breath. "Please call me Sam."

"Sam!" she whispered huskily. "Sam, from the moment I saw your picture in the newspaper I realized it is

I who have been searching for you!"

"You've lost your mind!"

"Oh, don't make jokes, Sam. I've searched all my life for you—" her lips parted and waited for mine to respond.

I backed into the sofa and sat involuntarily. "I don't even know you, Miss Winslow—"

"I'll give you the opportunity—"

"You're certainly making it easy for me so far."

"Goodie!"

"It is not goodie—I mean it is not good! After all, whether I'm paid or not, the fact remains you and your mind are still separated. That isn't healthy."

"Oh, posh! I'm having the time of my life. I've never felt so free and relaxed and wonderful—"

"Don't you understand, Miss Winslow, you don't know what you're doing!"

"You mean just because my narrow mind is somewhere else? That's silly."

"You *need* your mind! And your mind needs you!"

"Why?"

"Because—well, it's elementary—you—that is, it can't—" I shrugged. "I don't *know* why."

Her infectious laugh caused strange pulsations in the gen-

eral vicinity of my heart. She moved nearer to me. The room was close to steam-bath temperature.

"All I need is the right to live my life as I see fit. And I concede that same right to my mind. *It* is content with bedsheets, goatsmilk and mystical incantations." She bounded from the sofa, threw her hands in the air and whirled in front of me. "Look at me! Do I need bedsheets?"

"Uh-uh!"

She was back beside me on the sofa, her face close to mine. "Do I need goatsmilk, watercress, yogurt, trances, mystics, infinity, hearts of lettuce?"

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no!!!"

"Do I need to live life as it was meant to be lived? Marry, have children, wash dishes, buy groceries, love a good husband—"

It finally came home to me that there wasn't a damn thing wrong with this girl! It was that mind of hers! That mind that had gone through life wearing blinders, preventing her from enjoying a rich, full life!

"Sam?"

"What?"

Smooth, pale hands caressed my neck. "Why don't you kiss me?" Her lips parted.

This time they didn't wait for mine to respond.

Miss Winslow—I should say Joan—left my apartment at four that morning. If she was once under the spell of a closed mind, it was nothing compared to the spell I had fallen under. She was the most captivating creature I'd ever met.

I lay stretched out on my bed thinking of how whacky the day had begun and how beautifully it had ended. Then I reminded myself that it was a new day, one which promised to be hectic once I followed the instructions she had left me.

The door buzzer sounded half a dozen times before I budged. It was Brophy, looking twice as dapper as he did the day before.

"Morning, Sam!" He was cheerful as hell.

"What time is it?"

"Ten o'clock. Did the girl show up here last night?"

"I'll say she did!"

He threw a jaundiced glance at my suit which I had neglected to remove before plopping on the bed. "You must have had some night."

"What a girl, Brophy! What a remarkable girl!"

"What an understatement!"

I told him to make himself

at home. I phoned Max's delicatessen for two coffees, then went to my desk and wrote Brophy a check.

"What's this?" He seemed puzzled.

"A thousand bucks. Ten percent. Isn't that what we agreed on?"

"Aw, forget it, Sam?"

"Why?"

"The dame told me she was going to cancel the ten grand check. Wouldn't be fair for me to take *your* dough."

I slapped the check into his palm. "My pleasure, Brophy. You deserve it."

"How come? I thought I goofed."

"You did exactly the right thing telling her about me. I tell you, Brophy, it's wonderful!"

"What's wonderful? For crying out loud, Sam, *say* something, will you?"

"Love is wonderful! Fate is wonderful!"

"Okay, love and fate are wonderful. What the hell are you talking about?"

"Brophy, I am going to marry Joan Winslow."

"Cancel that coffee, Sam. I need a drink!"

"I'm serious. Just a few minor details have to be ironed out. I'll have to have another talk with her mind today—"

The detective couldn't have winced more painfully if he'd been stuck with a poisoned arrow. "Aw, come on, Sam, will you cut that disembodied mind bit—"

"Listen, you've got to believe me! You see, when this girl's mind and body were together the mind was always going off in these crazy trances—"

"Mr. Corrigan, as a lawyer you are morally obligated not to discuss your client's personal affairs!"

As usual the voice of Miss Winslow's dispossessed psyche popped in from nowhere.

Brophy's eyes widened. He grew as rigid as a marble statue. "Who said that, Sam? Tell me who said that!"

"I said it, Mr. Brophy!"

Poor Brophy turned oyster-white. "Sam, who came in the door!"

"Don't worry, Brophy, it's only Miss Winslow's mind—"

"Now stop it, Sam! I don't believe it!" He jumped from his chair, jerking his head in every direction. "It's a gag, Sam! Tell old Brophy it's a gag!"

"Mr. Corrigan, I would like to speak with you alone. If you will kindly remove this foolish man—"

A resounding thud, as of a

safe dropping to a sidewalk, drew my attention from the voice. Brophy had fainted dead away. He lay stretched out on the floor, stiff as a piece of Oregon timber.

I addressed the voice. "How's that for service?"

"*My body telephoned me this morning!*" said the voice grimly. If there was a smile on my face it washed away quickly. "Mr. Corrigan, I have a good mind to report you to the Bar Association!"

"What for?" I asked with mock surprise.

"*I will not permit my body to marry a man like you!*"

"I don't think you have much to say in the matter."

The voice was furious. "I am your client, Mr. Corrigan! You are obligated to look out for MY best interests!"

"You've overlooked one thing. You are only half of my client."

"*I beg your pardon!*"

"My client is Joan Winslow. You only represent one-half of Joan Winslow. The other half is represented by the body. If I act solely on behalf of the mind I wouldn't be doing my job. And I'm a man who believes in doing the job. I represent the client, the whole client and nothing but—"

"*Stop behaving like a clown, Mr. Corrigan! You're a respectable lawyer. You should behave with decorum!*"

"Sorry, I haven't been the same since I met you in the flesh!"

"*I will not accept your rationalization of a lawyer-client relationship. I am the one who hired you! I have already paid you ten thousand—*"

"Your other half has stopped the payment!"

"*I'll send you another check!*"

"Miss Winslow, try to understand—your body is visible and you're not! It will simply go on cancelling checks."

"*Then I'll sue you, Mr. Corrigan!*"

"A plaintiff must make an appearance in a court of law. The only way you can appear is through your body."

The room vibrated as she grunted with disgust. A flower vase rose from the top of the bookcase.

"Hey, what are you doing?"

"*Just stand still, Mr. Corrigan!*"

The vase rose higher.

"Look out!" I yelled. "For Pete's sake, don't hit Brophy!"

The vase shattered not

more than six feet away from the detective's head. Brophy groaned and rolled over peacefully.

"Feel better?" I inquired.

"I WANT MY BODY BACK!"

I removed a sheet of paper from the top drawer of my desk. "There's something you neglected to tell me when you hired me, Miss Winslow."

"What might that be?"

"You didn't tell me that you can't enter the body again until and unless the body wants you. And the sad fact is your body doesn't want you—"

"Why, of all the ungrateful—"

"It doesn't want you as you are, that is. Now if you would be willing to change, stop all this mysticism, live a normal existence—"

"And marry you? Never! I'll stay in limbo forever before surrendering myself—"

"Very well," I made a checkmark on the piece of paper, "that takes care of condition number one."

"What about Aunt Abby's money? I suppose my body wants that all to herself!"

"Your body cares nothing about the money, and therefore is willing to strike a compromise agreement with you."

"I will not compromise!"

"Then I have nothing more to say to you, Miss Winslow."

"I have something more to say," Brophy had returned to consciousness. "Where the hell are you, Miss Winslow?"

The voice ignored him. "You can't do this to me, Mr. Corrigan! I am the mind! My body will not get along without me for very long!!"

"I don't know how the hell it's gotten along without you this long," Brophy wailed.

"Maybe your body has a mind of its own," I said.

Brophy turned to say something to me. I saw the heavy book come spiralling through the air. "Look out, Bro—"

There were two thuds. One when the book hit Brophy and the next when Brophy hit the floor.

I yelled in the direction the voice had been coming from. "Miss Winslow, I have a good mind to get out my vacuum cleaner and bag you for good!"

"I'm not beaten yet, Mr. Corrigan! Good-bye!"

I fetched a bottle of smelling salts from the medicine cabinet and passed it under Brophy's nose. Just as he approached the halfway point between slumberland and reality, in walked Joan Winslow (in the flesh).

Another anguished groan escaped his lips.

"Brophy," I warned him, "if you pass out on me again I'll never forgive you!"

He passed out colder than a sheet of Yukon ice.

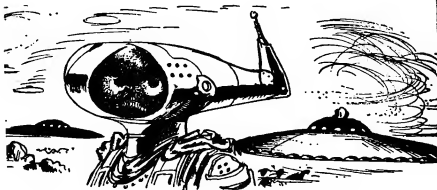
The disembodied psyche finally gave in to a compromise. It amounted to a live and let live agreement, and was effected in order to prevent Aunt Abby's money from being used to construct a national home for stray cats. As matters stood neither the mind nor the body had any desire or need for the money. But they shared the desire to spare the Winslow name from becoming the butt of a monstrous joke, something to do with the kind of house Winslow money would help build.

Two weeks later Joan and I were married in Connecticut. We hauled Brophy along to be best man. He had not completely recovered from his experience in my apartment. He kept listening for voices.

Then the judge reached the traditional phrase, "If there is anyone here present who can show just cause why these two should not be joined together let him speak now or forever hold his peace."

We waited for an instant, expecting Miss Winslow's mind to interrupt the ceremony. For a moment there was the beginning of a whisper, but it trailed off into silence. Then I began to wonder what would happen on the honeymoon!

THE END



CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN

By RON GOULART

*Take his cloak away from Superman
and what have you got?*

LYNN PETTIFORD was enjoying the surrey ride from the spaceport. It was the first time she had seen a horse. The afternoon sun, shining through softly rustling leaves, made fluttering patterns on the dirt road. Off in the yellow fields bright birds sang and insects hummed. Lynn stretched her legs out and lit a cigarette.

The stooped old driver turned his head and touched the visor of his faded black cap. "Young ladies aren't allowed to smoke out of doors in Scattergood Territory, miss," he said, smiling apologetically.

"Sorry," Lynn said, dropping the cigarette to the surrey floor and grinding it out with her foot. She inhaled deeply and leaned back.

A flock of blackbirds rose out of the field to the left and swirled up into the sky. Lynn watched them until the surrey top cut off her view. Then she shifted a little on her seat and closed her eyes.

Far in the distance a cowbell rang slowly and stopped, a wooden fence creaked.

"Trouble," said the old driver, reining up. "Looks like trouble, miss."

Lynn sat up, blinking. "What?"

The old man pointed to a cloud of dust growing on the road ahead. "Might just be highwaymen."

"Oh," said Lynn, sliding her purse behind her and kicking her tan suitcase into the shadows at her feet.

The driver pulled at the peak of his cap and squinted.

"Three masked men on horseback heading his way."

Lynn could see them now, too. Their clothes were black, their heads covered with scarlet hoods. "My fiancé's with Detective Central here in Scattergood," she said. "I don't suppose that would discourage them."

"Might just make them nastier. You never can tell with highwaymen." The old man stiffened as the horsemen came closer. "Wait now. What's that they're carrying?"

Lynn frowned. "Looks like canvas sacks."

The driver sighed. "We're safe then. Those are bank robbers, not highwaymen. It's hard to tell them apart sometimes."

Lynn unclenched her hands. "They might still be dangerous."

The three robbers turned off the road about fifteen yards ahead of the squire and galloped across a field. In a clutter of low trees there was a dark stone cottage.

"Hideout," said the driver, nodding at the cottage.

"Shouldn't we be getting on?"

The driver slapped his freckled hands together a few times and jumped down to

the road. He shaded his eyes and looked up into the clear sky. "Yessir, yessir." He grabbed off his cap and waved it in jerky circles, hopping as he did.

"What is it now?" Lynn asked, wondering if the excitement of seeing the bandits up close had produced some kind of nervous attack in the old man.

"DC's coming. There's their flyer."

Lynn leaned out. Overhead a sparkling rectangle was descending. "Detective Central?"

"Of course. They're the only ones can fly in Scattergood. They're going to get those badmen."

"Won't we be in the way?"

The driver flattened his cap back on. "Foolish to try a daylight robbery anyhow. DC always gets them." He turned to Lynn. "We have a saying around here, miss. Crime never pays. Watch." He chuckled and spun to watch the silver flyer land silently in the grass across the road.

The flyer had hardly stopped quivering when its hatch popped open and two men shot out. They seemed to be tall, well-developed men, with good tans. The first man, holding what looked like a blaster pistol, ran in great

strides toward the bandits' cottage. He sparkled and glittered in the sun. His scarlet uniform was trimmed in gold and silver and his boots reflected the yellow grass as he ran. His silver helmet threw a glare suddenly into Lynn's eyes and she looked away. But she said, with surprise, "Alec."

When she had rubbed her eyes and looked again the first DC patrolman was sailing through the air, his hands at his sides. One of the bandits threw a spear out of a small window. The spear hit the man who resembled Lynn's fiance in the left shoulder and bounced off. The DC man's head hit the stone wall at this point and Lynn screamed, "Alec, you'll dislocate something!"

He went through the cottage wall, sending stone and mortar off in jagged arcs. The thatch roof came down as though it had been sucked from within.

The second DC man was standing half-way to the collapsing hideout, a black suitcase in his hand. A blaster spun slowly in his other hand.

The man who looked like Alec Harker rose out of the ruins, carrying two unconscious robbers by their collars. He dropped them near

his partner and dived back into the rubble. This time he came out with the loot and the third bandit, who was trying to pull his tattered scarlet hood back on.

Lynn stood up, then swung out of the surrey and ran across the dusty road. She raised one gloved hand and called, "Alec. Is that you?"

The patrolman was stuffing bandits into the DC flyer. He looked up, a wide smile growing on his tanned face. "Take over here, Gil." Then he walked toward the girl.

Lynn stepped into the grass, wondering what she'd say if this wasn't Alec. She knew he was on duty someplace and hadn't been able to meet her. Still she wasn't sure. "Alec?" The yellow grass was rough against her ankles.

"Lynn," said Alec, pulling off his silver helmet. "What a great damned surprise."

He didn't sound like Alec, his voice was deeper. But he seemed to be Alec. "Hello," Lynn said. "Do you take risks like this often?"

"No risk." He caught her in his arms, laughing. He kissed her.

Lynn relaxed a moment, then pulled back. "Glad to see me?" She frowned, studying

his face. "My, that's some tan."

Alec grinned and let her go. He ran a forefinger down his cheek, leaving a light line. "Part of it's makeup. Look, I've got to turn these crooks in, but I'm off at six. I'll pick you up at the Old Scattergood House and take you to dinner around seven." He took her shoulders. "Six months is a long time."

Lynn made a white line down his other cheek with her thumb. She nodded and turned toward the surrey.

Alec Harker whistled as he washed up, keeping time with his bare foot on the tile floor. After he'd passed through the drying chamber he got his clothes out of his closet. He noticed a spot of tarnish on his uniform epaulet and rubbed at it with his moistened finger. In a way it was too bad you could only wear your uniform on duty. Alec pulled on his gray trousers and sealed the fly seam. Striped blazers were in style in Scattergood now and Alec had two conservative ones. He put on the green blazer and snapped on a bow tie. He walked to the wall mirror and studied himself, smoothing out his crew-cut. He always looked shorter in street clothes.

Gil Miley, Alec's partner in Detective Central, came out of the dry room. "That's Lynn, huh?"

"Yeah," said Alec, straddling a straight metal chair.

"Pretty. Nice legs. I prefer blondes, though."

"Lynn's a blonde. Well, auburn I guess is the color."

"I mean blonde like—oh, like those stag show dancers we brought in last month."

"Dyed," said Alec.

Miley shrugged and put on a pair of work denims. "Tough being separated from her for so long."

"Sure was. I told you Lynn was a stewardess for Transpace, didn't I? Well, when the chance came up for a long haul she took it. Double pay. That was about the time Uncle Jake said he could get me on here if I wanted to earn some money before I went back to Mars Grad for my masters."

Miley took a yellow blazer out of his closet. "So now you've got a pile and'll settle down by a quiet canal?"

"I guess. I sort of like it on Metro though. I mean, here in Scattergood."

"Good Lord," said Miley. "I'd rather get a hardship post on Pluto."

"I enjoy the work is the thing." Alec looked up at the

wall clock. "Going toward the Old Scattergood House?"

"No. I got a tip there's a bordello going in the Quaker Quarter. With a live piano player."

"Going to raid it?"

"Eventually."

Alec smiled and went out. The soda fountain next to Detective Central headquarters was full of laughing couples. Old Pop Arnold waved at Alec as he passed.

Alec stopped at the corner to let an ice cream truck clatter by. The scarlet plumes of the horses flickered brightly.

Too bad you had to pass through the fringes of the Cropper Quarter to get to the Old Scattergood House. Alec didn't like to go through there out of uniform and with none of his equipment. Off duty you could only carry one small blaster in a shoulder holster.

The swinging doors of the Green Lama, a known hang-out of Zen Buddhists, flapped wide and three bearded men tumbled out into the street. One of them swung a buggy whip in his hand. The man on the bottom of the pile crawled to the curb and broke his beer bottle into a jagged weapon.

Alec, a block away from the brawl, slowed his pace slightly. Trouble would delay him.

And he always felt a lack of authority in plain clothes. He stopped and looked in the window of a bicycle repair shop, trying not to hear the crack of the whip.

Two more bearded men joined the fight, waving stools and shouting.

Alec took a deep breath. Maybe he would have to stop this. But then out of the twilight came a DC flyer. And two patrolmen flew into the fight.

Smiling, Alec crossed the street and took a short cut to the hotel. It would be good to be with Lynn again. Even though he would have to tell her he wanted to stay on with Detective Central. Scattergood wasn't a bad place to settle.

Coming down the wooden-railed stairs into the lobby of the Old Scattergood, Lynn Pettiford smiled. She recognized Alec at once this time. His quiet grin, the way he twisted his head to one side as if his collar were too tight. He always did that when waiting in a public place.

She squeezed the hand he held out to help her down the last step. "You look much more yourself now."

Alec nodded. "Lynn, I've got a hansom cab out front.

Thought we'd go out to the Weary Traveler's Haven Inn on the outskirts of town."

"That would be appropriate."

The night was warm and clear, still darkening. The long ride to the inn was smooth and soothing. Six months was a long time and they didn't talk much on the way out, except early in the journey when Alec pointed out DC headquarters and Lynn made an admiring remark.

In the shadowy hansom Alec was much more like the Alec Lynn had fallen in love with in her senior year at Mars Union University. Lynn felt that sighing was something you got out of your system by your second term in your sorority. Still she allowed herself to sigh twice.

The inn was run by a round bald man known as Pop Bachtold. He greeted them warmly and led them to a secluded, candle lit table near one of the dining room's stained glass windows. Something was singing beneath the window and Lynn assumed it was a nightingale, although she had never heard one.

"I love to see young people eat soup," said Pop Bachtold, clasping his hands over his

aproned stomach and smiling as they began the first course. He chuckled and tiptoed away from them.

Lynn took three courses to tell Alec about the long haul with Transpace. The touch down ports, the blue man who'd made a pass at her during a fireworks display in a Plutonian bazaar. Then over her apple pie she said, "And how's Detective Central? I suppose you'll be glad to get back to Mars. Not that this hasn't been the practical thing to do." She smiled. "I'm proud of us, being able to do the practical things the universe requires. Now we have a nest egg and can settle down on Mars."

Alec coughed and the candle went out. "Excuse me." He got out the lighter Lynn had given him for graduation and re-lit the fat blue candle. "Funny thing, Lynn."

"What?" She set down her fork.

"Well, when I first got out here I expected to dislike police work. Even though 97% of the testing machines at VocVac said I had an aptitude. But it turns out I enjoy my job. I actually do." He met her eyes briefly.

"Enjoy it? Oh. And I've been feeling sorry for you. You actually like doing things

like that business this afternoon?"

He grinned. "Yes. I do. And we'll get a bonus, besides helping the cause of justice."

"By the way," Lynn said, searching in her purse for cigarettes. "How did you do that this afternoon? I meant to ask. Fly and bust through a stone wall."

"Well, Lynn. The set-up here in Scattergood is different than some." He had his napkin wrapped around his fist now and he started untwisting it. "The settlers in this part of Metro went in for a simple sort of life. A semi-rural, small town life. Of course, some of the mineral strikes later on let in a rougher element. But through the years Detective Central has been quite successful in keeping Scattergood a simple, fairly honest territory." He shook his head. "You shouldn't smoke here. It's considered improper. The way DC does it is by not allowing development beyond a certain point. That follows the principles of the founding fathers and makes law enforcing a little easier. See, we're the only ones with flying machines or any kind of advanced weapon. What you saw today is a pretty good example of how we work. A lot of it is show-

manship. Gil, that's my partner—Gil Miley, a great guy—had a disassembler in that black box and a stun beam under his hat. That's what got the house and dazed the robbers. I had a flying belt on. It's, you know, just applied science. But we make it look like DC guys are pretty much invincible. Fear is the strongest weapon a police force can have. It keeps all but the rowdiest element in line."

"Why did you have makeup on?" Lynn dropped her cigarette absently back into her purse.

"Look, Lynn, most of it is makeup of one sort or another. Trappings, stage effects. The people are sort of simple here. They've been kept that way. They simply go in for a little color. DC likes us to have an outdoorsy look. I never did tan well. You remember that week on the Left Bank."

"Seems like a silly way to run a police force."

"Police work varies from territory to territory, from planet to planet. Detective Central is adaptable. Anyway, the Universe Combine sets DC policy." Alec grinned. "Anyhow, I enjoy the work here. And I'd like to stay on."

"I thought we wanted to

settle on Mars. Have our children grow up there. Now you say you want to run around out here and act like some school boy hero."

Alec rolled his napkin into a ball along the table edge. "But in these last few months I really think I've become a more mature person, Lynn. I don't want to give that up."

"Maturity is something you can take with you."

"I'm not sure. It's more a way I feel on duty, Lynn. I'm afraid if I quit DC now I'll just go back to being the kind of person I was."

"You don't want that?"

"How about some steaming coffee, ground fresh from Earth-grown beans?" asked Pop Bachtold, smiling down at them.

"Fine," said Alec.

Pop chuckled and withdrew, humming to himself.

"You just want to stay here and fly through the air and poke your head through stone walls. It's childish."

"No, Lynn. I feel more confident, more at ease with DC. I'm reluctant to lose that." He looked across at her. "I feel—well—safe in a way."

"My God, didn't you feel safe in college? That is sure as hell a safe place."

"They don't like to hear girls use harsh language in

public out here, Lynn," Alec said, lowering his voice. "Sure, I felt secure in college. But with DC I have a little more authority, prestige. I know I was Senior Class Treasurer, but it's not quite the same."

After Pop Bachtold had left the coffee Lynn said, "I don't think I want my coffee. May we go back now?"

Alec stopped his cup halfway to his mouth. "I thought you claimed to understand me?"

"I do," she said, gathering up her purse and gloves and standing. She walked carefully across the dining room, hoping Alec would follow her. He did.

Applying his makeup Alec said, "It's okay now, Gil. Patched up."

Gil Miley pulled on a boot, frowning at the scuffed toe. "So what are you going to do?"

"Well, Lynn's going to try to get based here and we'll both keep on working for possibly another year."

Miley rubbed saliva on his boot toe. "You like this routine that much?"

"Sure." Alec buttoned his blouse and squinted out the window. "Kind of overcast. Think I'll wear my cape."

"I'm only staying in because you can retire at forty. Then I think I'll settle on one of those bordello satellites."

"This is my first real job, of course, but I like it." Alec brushed the scarlet lining of his cape and then flapped it twice in the air.

Miley strapped on his helmet and flipped his cigarette into the floor dispozer. "Well, let's go."

"I've got a new routine worked out for breaking up unlawful rallies, Gil," Alec said, fastening his cape. "Indoor ones. See, you'd come in through the wall and then I'd follow through the ceiling. Or if we're lucky the building might have a skylight. All that shattering glass makes a nice effect."

"Most secret meetings are held in basements," said Miley. He grinned briefly and went out the door to the landing lot.

Old Pop Donner at the livery stable gave Alec and Lynn the best horse and buggy he had. It was, he said, his gesture to young love.

Alec concentrated on controlling the horse until they were out of town and on the straight road that led to Old Lovers' Point. Nobody went there much anymore, but it

would be a fine spot for a picnic. "I'm glad things are settled," Alec said after awhile.

Lynn twisted her hand over the handle of the basket on the seat between them. "If you think staying with Detective Central another year is such a good thing, well, I guess I can't object. Oh, and I stopped at the Transpace office this morning."

"And?"

"There's a pretty good chance I'll be able to work out of here. Or at least out of Metro."

"Great. After the picnic we can drive by the new development and look around at cottages." He put his hand over Lynn's. "Maybe we could lease one for a year." He slid his hand under hers and took the handle of the picnic basket. He lifted the basket into the back of the buggy and drew Lynn over nearer to him. "Sound okay?"

"Fine." Lynn rested her head on his shoulder, her auburn hair fluttering in the warm breeze. "Much more comfortable without epaulets."

Old Lovers' Point was deserted and the yellow grass high. Alec tethered the horse and he and Lynn wandered downhill. "I've never been out here before," Alec said.

"I'm glad," Lynn said. A sign hung askew on a dead tree. Lynn stopped in front of it and straightened it with her hand. "Old Lovers' Point," she read. "This is the place all right." Paint flakes stuck to her finger as she let go and the sign swung back to its old position.

"People used to come out here often. Place has a big reputation. But I guess things go out of style, even in a controlled society. Gil, that's my partner, comes out here now and then."

Hand in hand they moved down a gradual slope. Lynn spotted another faded sign. "Old Lovers' Bridge. Let's find that."

"I think that's the wood bridge over Old Lovers' Canyon. Not much of a canyon. Only a half mile or so deep."

They climbed over a rise and then were in front of an ancient wooden bridge about a thousand feet long. Beyond the bridge was a cool, shadowy forest. "Let's eat lunch over there," Lynn said. "I bet

we can find a clearing and maybe a pool."

"Lunch," said Alec. "Left it in the buggy. Wait now and I'll get it." He touched Lynn's cheek with his fingertips and ran back to the buggy.

He had the basket in his hand when he heard the splintering and Lynn's cry. "My Lord," he said, dropping the basket.

When he got near the edge of the small canyon there was no Lynn. No bridge. He knelt at the rim and stared over.

Lynn was hanging a hundred feet down, her arms locked around a bridge cable that was still secured. "Pull me up, Alec," she shouted. "Pull."

Alec tried to stand and suddenly his legs went numb. His hands turned cold and wet and he almost pitched forward. Finally he found his voice. "I can't like this," he yelled down. "Hold on till I get my stuff."

By the time he got into his uniform and back out to the edge of the canyon Lynn was gone.

THE END

●

THE QUIET MAN

By ROBERT LAURENCE

*A Gothic tale of the world
of terror where the dream
and the death are Silence.*

SILENCE was the warmth for his soul. He had suffered in life and age came too swiftly. Falling, grasping, he possessed their library and there, in its most dark reaches, the incunabula of time were taken to him, twisted malignantly through the tormented whorl of his brain. When his mind and heart were ready, he went to the streets.

Quiet was his armor. He swore that the quiet he made would never cease.

He would stand in the streets, the shadow of a man. You would not know his shabby dress, the overcoat he wore in heat and cold. His eyes

would be all of him and they could hate with an intensity that was not human. His eyes would fix upon you and were insane with triumph at the possession of your scrutiny and your fallen head or your quick escape from him.

And it was known. Years before, his strangeness had become legend and, now, that legend transpired. From the tale, the fear parents had imposed upon their children, he became alive. They no longer admonished, "Be good or the Quiet Man . . ." They locked their doors, their windows, and when a child cried they were awake. Through their

nights, terror was created. Sounds were heard. Perverse-ly documenting their fear, he chalked the library. He chalked the tar roads and the walks and their houses:

"I WANT CHILDREN QUIET TO SILENCE EARTH. I WILL TELL YOU MORE. IT WILL BE TOO LATE!"

Marcia Adams had read the wild scrawl his hand presented. Every parent had. She had dressed for bed early that night and she combed her blonde hair out, let it fall to the soft curve of her back and in front to the rise of her breasts.

"Stay with us," she whispered.

The night was cold and she got up and unfolded against him and Richard felt like staying with her. For a moment when she touched his neck with hands warm, he felt her breathing deepen and the warmth of her body was every reason for staying. He stepped back quickly. He was sorry he had. She was beautiful, this woman. She was soft and warm. Her lips were like a touch of warm softness he could not describe because it was her and there was like her no composite of warmth and softness with the strength

that bound and held and presented her.

"Stay with me," she said. Richard quickly turned from her.

"It's a lot of nonsense," he said

"What is nonsense?" she said softly.

"Look, Marcia. The baby'll be all right. *Quiet Man*—if he were going to do something he'd have done it long ago. Threats. Nothing more. Just threats. How many *real* threats have there been? How many empty threats and things that were almost true?"

Marcia's face turned hard and cold. She held the child's crib and turned herself against him.

"Almost!" she shouted. "Don't leave! The police believe—"

"A lot depends on the 3 X—the way I handle her. I'm not any younger and maybe I'm scared, but I've got to be. I've got to be on line by morning. I'm gonna be! You want me to crack up and lose the damn job?"

"You're so sure. So damned sure. I tell you—I know!" It would always be quiet, she knew. It would always be quiet.

"If you're so damn sure," Richard laughed, "then com-

municate. I'll only be across the bay. Premonition — wise up! It's mathematical. I take a plane up and if my percentage is up—I'm finished. It's always been that way and I'm careful and I'm certainly not going to start worrying about any idiotic Quiet Man! I'm worried about the job. That's enough!"

"Richard!"

"Forget it, Marcia! It's bunk!"

"No! The thought's strong in me. OUR CHILD. He's told me it!"

"Told you it?"

"You've had the sense of it. Haven't you had the same thought? Someone warning you, warning you. WARNING YOU, Richard."

Richard laughed, walked out and started the car.

"Just be careful," he called back. Then he tried making her laugh. "I'm careful I don't get killed. You be careful you don't get Creedmore."

"Keep in touch!" he shouted as he drove out. He tapped his forehead.

Their baby disappeared.

All night the wind had tormented and the arms of trees touched their windows. By morning, with Richard gone, the baby's crib was empty.

The child had, in one mo-

ment, disappeared, and Marcia dropped and saw smash to pieces the formula she'd prepared. She found their back window taken out, a glass cutter beside it. The window pane lay in the baby's crib and her throat tightened dry as she gazed on her own reflection. Quiet had come.

She could not speak and then it seemed that at once, silently, the whole town had come together. Three children were missing and the Quiet Man had pinned one note to each crib. Quickly, methodically, his mind had found a straw for him to savor. His life they had stolen! He'd been wronged! The note read:

"By the criminal law, such being the solicitude of the State to protect life before birth, it is a great crime to kill the child after it is able to stir in the mother's womb and it may be murder . . ."

He would rather look down at earth than admire our heavens. He was the never-born child—the State and vengeance! Quiet had come and he dared God to change it.

Richard could not be contacted and, trembling, Marcia

followed the crowd across the marshes. There stood his house. The Quiet Man did not hold title to it. It was a deserted place, Gothic in style, and outside stood police, firemen—all the town. Children did not cry from inside the house. Terror quieted them. There was nothing to do but be quiet. To enter the place would be to initiate a sacrifice swifter and perhaps more horrible. They waited in silence. The only sounds were those of gulls and distant jets above the bay. Marcia prayed for Richard to know her need. But he was right. He was so right about the percentages of chance and his cold, abstract pleasure in probability and result would be his comfort no longer. Let him just count on her again. She cursed him. Let him count on her mind or her love or her body. The Quiet Man laughed from his window, darting quickly from their sight and then appearing again, holding up their children one by one, bathing in the terror his hands would render them. Silently Marcia called to Richard.

Suddenly then, the quiet broke and there were quick sounds heard and the Quiet Man peered from his window to see nothing, put down the last child. The sound went on

and on, got louder, coming from nowhere, and he clasped his ears. He stood dazed there. *He had lost and the earth was restored.*

Quiet had lost and to what he did not know.

The crowd knew what—for each stolen child belonged to every person there. Above them, above each of them and in back of the house and not seen from within, the Quiet Man's fear raced with the speed of sound. Moving at the same speed, sound waves were superimposed one upon the other, and pressure built into a strong shock wave front until his fear dove to earth. His fear dove again and again and jarring tremors came to earth. Then his fear built up momentum and from near fifteen thousand feet it dove once more and the sound waves followed wild in the same direction. When his fear ascended, a sonic blast of the greatest magnitude struck into earth and shattered earth. The Quiet Man screamed and the veins in his temples pulsated like the ground had. Marcia looked up and saw beams in the Gothic house crack and the doors split. Her child had been freed and she saw the markings 3 X—the markings of Rich-

ard's test plane and she knew that he had heard her and Richard would believe her now and the Quiet Man could see and believe nothing. Shingles fell and glass broke to pieces and the Quiet Man, fighting and trembling from the sudden fury, beating his arms and escaping the un-

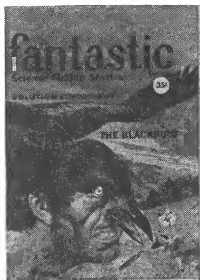
known that was attacking earth, leaped through the jagged glass and bled and screamed and was held down tight to see Richard's plane strike like an eagle for its fledglings and mate . . .

All held their children and cried out in joy.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

For the first time in its history, **FANTASTIC** for September will bring you a complete short novel—Charles W. Runyon's *Solution Tomorrow*.



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Plus other stories and all our regular features. Tell your newsdealer to reserve a copy of the September **FANTASTIC** for you.

It goes on sale August 20.

*There are more things in heaven and
earth than are dreamt of in our
philosophy, Horatio...and also in...*

THE SHAKESPEARE MANUSCRIPT

By ARTHUR PORGES

OLDENBURG, that crabbed, grasping bibliophile, had found in his antiquarian researches a vastly intriguing passage concerning the demon, Belphegor. According to the monkish authority, it was possible to demand and receive service from this most arrogant of devils; and the necessary steps, repulsive and exhausting, were precisely listed.

Yet Oldenburg had so far resisted temptation, for the monk included a blunt warning that, heavenly punishment aside, Belphegor, terrible and subtle monster, was not lightly enslaved by any mere mortal, and once free again, would strike back in frightful ways at his temporary master. Quoting Milton with relish, the monk spoke of

"pangs unfelt before," and urged the superiority of prayer.

But now the bibliophile was desperate. His most hated rival, William Caughlin, had acquired—and this in a single phenomenal month—not only Queen Elizabeth's personal copy of "Romeo and Juliet," with certain bawdy marginal notations of her own in that angular handwriting later generations found strangely attractive; but also a flawless first edition of "Robinson Crusoe," probably the best preserved copy known. Thus, at one incredible stroke, Caughlin had made his collection of rare books unassailably superior to Oldenburg's library.

Elizabeth's "Romeo" was, of course, unique, and could

not be duplicated; and the only outstanding Defoes, dealers knew, were irretrievably locked up in museums and college libraries. One by one, the greatest treasures of literature had been taken from the open market in favor of educational institutions. It was, Oldenburg felt, distinctly unfair to private collectors. He now stood a poor second to Caughlin; worse, competition was no longer even possible. All the top "finds" were out of circulation permanently; you couldn't buy anything back from the Huntington Library or Harvard University. How was he to catch up?

There was, obviously, only one possible way to rectify an intolerable situation. There might very well be something to the theory of devils and possessions. Summers thought so, as did that Murray woman, who wrote about witch-cults. In any case, it was worth a try. Oldenburg resolved to summon Belphegor, let the consequences be what they might.

It was conceivable, his authority declared, for a sufficiently legalistic and devious mind to render impotent so mighty a devil as Belphegor, by wringing adequate promises of immunity from him

while he was temporarily subordinated. Such agreements, however unwillingly accepted, were invariably honored to the letter; so much the monk admitted in favor of this particular rebel against God. The demon must perform exactly as ordered; and Oldenburg believed that the veritable injunction, carefully phrased, he was prepared to wield against Belphegor — should the creature actually appear, which seemed highly doubtful — would protect him from any reprisals.

To his pleased surprise, everything went as planned. When the grim ritual was completed, and the final incantation uttered, the study fire flickered thrice; a glinting, cloudy shape reared itself in the darkest corner, and a deep, sougning voice, steelly resonant with bright, non-human tones, announced: "I am Belphegor. What is your will with me, Mortal? Speak now that I am here."

Oldenburg, shaken but resolute, faced the vague form bravely enough. He was a true fanatic, whose standing as a bookman meant more to him than the danger of offending a demon. He recited in an almost mechanical way the statement he had memorized. Thus he guarded himself

against any fatal oversights due to excitement or fear.

"Somewhere there must be," he said in a loud sing-song voice, "a manuscript play, or collection of plays, in Shakespeare's own hand. I order you to get it for me. I don't care how or where, except that it must not be the legal property of anybody in a position to challenge my ownership. And I want it today."

He paused, took a long breath, and plunged into the second, precautionary statement.

"You are to obey that order literally: get the manuscript today; leave it with me, and depart. No more; no less. You are not to alter it in any way; particularly you must not enchant or poison it in order to injure me. Neither you nor your agents are to molest me at any time. I repeat: you are herewith bound, as circumstances authorize me to bind you, to the strictly limited role of messenger, obtaining such a play, at your discretion, and bringing it to me as it is. Do you agree?"

"I must, and I do," Belphegor replied; and Oldenburg gulped queasily at what seemed the cool irony behind the demon's prompt submission. Anger would have been more reassuring by far.

"Then carry out my orders at once."

The smoky image vanished; Oldenburg fought his knotted stomach. Let the demon squirm; with those commands it was impossible for him to strike back. By holding him to the exact letter of a single mission, and barring further commerce between them, the man surely had baffled the evil spirit. Nor would he make the mistake of summoning him again for more treasures. That was what doomed most meddlers — excessive greed. He would play it safe.

Oldenburg looked about the cozy, book-lined study, rubbing his palms together and chuckling fruitily. Which play would it be? And where would Belphegor find it? Even "Titus Andronicus" would do. There were many possibilities: hundreds of musty attics, store-rooms, and unexplored monasteries hid documents undreamed of by scholars. Take the Boswell Papers, for example, overlooked for decades in a castle constantly inhabited. Then there were the almost virgin collections of the remote Tibetan lamaseries, where among faded Asiatic scrolls a million lost English incunabula might be buried. Not three months earlier, a party reconnoitering

among the Himalayas for some new peak to climb, had found, in just such a religious library, a perfect Coverdale Bible.

He was still musing, two hours later, when something dropped fluttering through the air to fall on the desk by his hand. It was a large booklet of soiled vellum, made by crudely binding together many scribbled leaves. On the cover, in faded ink, were the magic words: "The Historie of Hamblett, Prince of Denmarke," and under them the rarest of all notable autographs. Oldenburg clutched the pamphlet; time stood still, while the stars sang together; and one corner of the priceless vellum was suddenly moistened. It was the first tear the misanthrope had shed since his childhood, forty years earlier.

For a week Oldenburg gloated over the manuscript. He made countless tests: microscopic examinations; chemical analysis of the ink; letter by letter scrutiny of every word; and an exhaustive comparison with a photograph of Shakespeare's authenticated signature, taken from his famous will. Unshaven, haggard, the bibliophile began to feel very seedy; inadequate

meals, hastily gulped, and little or no rest, inevitably took their toll. But he ignored such trivial inconveniences, glorying in his prize, and satisfied that Belphegor, after a week, had disappeared unavenged.

As he pored over the difficult script, Oldenburg would chuckle in delight on finding so many previous speculations of his confirmed; or, on occasion, grumble at mistakes that now seemed inexcusably stupid. He wondered often how best to make use of this unique touchstone. Perhaps it would be most fun to expose, very blandly, a dozen egregious errors on the part of each distinguished critic, from Coleridge and Johnson to Bradley and Kitteridge. And then his contemporaries—they would react in a fury, questioning the validity of his conclusions, and demanding evidence. Then later, he would discover the very manuscript needed to vindicate his stand. How they would fume in secret over his incredible prescience! He'd make a few minor errors, himself; it might not do to be too obvious. Even thinking about the possibilities was enough to make him snicker.

Ten days having passed since Oldenburg obtained the bundle of vellum, he sat red-

eyed at his desk, adding to an enormous stack of note-cards; a photographic replica of the First Folio at his left.

"Idiot!" he muttered. "'Too solid flesh' is right, after all, and I declared for 'Too sullied.' Urrgh! What else could I do when that imbecile, Caughlin took the other side. He's only one jump ahead of a Baconian. Well, let him enjoy his one petty victory; I've been right ten times to his once. Besides, I have—It!"

At that very moment, as he patted the booklet lovingly, flaming talons tore at his vitals. Gasping, he shrank in the chair. His bones were shafts of searing agony, and a tom-tom throbbed in the tenderest fibers of his brain.

"Oh, my God!" he cried weakly, attempting to rise. It was impossible; he hadn't the strength; he was dizzy and nauseated. A few moments earlier he had been vaguely uneasy, his head aching mildly; but now a mere indisposition of some days, which he had assigned to hunger, fatigue, and excitement, was giving way to something that gripped stomach and bowels like a tiger.

"What's wrong with me?" he groaned, as a dull saw divided his skull. "The phone—I'll call a doctor—"

Making a desperate effort, he succeeded in standing up and shoving back the heavy armchair; but after one lurching step, he staggered; his knees gave way, and twisting in a half turn, he just managed to crumple against the desk.

His blurring gaze rested once more on the vellum bundle. "The only one in the world," he thought muzzily. "Where has this 'Hamlet' been hidden for so long? Where did he find it?"

Then he heard, echoing in a measureless distance, a mocking laugh, and the vibrant, tones of the great demon.

"I was free to find it anywhere—and chose Time instead of Space. I snatched it from the hands of a dying man, a bookish fellow; it was in London, and the year was 1665. I did nothing to the play—merely carried it to you as ordered."

A grinding sickness overwhelmed the man's body. "What was he dying of?" he muttered, groping mentally for some far-off, terrible knowledge that eluded him.

"It was the year of the Great Plague. You know what he was dying of—*Master!*" And with a final burst of ironic laughter, the taunting voice was gone.

THE END



According to you...

Dear Editor:

The cover of the April issue was one of those idiotic pieces of junk that has given science fiction its bad name. As your companion magazine improves, *Fantastic* deteriorates.

The best thing in the issue was the editorial, which was interesting. I think I would like to be an Elf or a Hobbit (see the J.R.R. Tolkien story of the same name). If it's limited to evil characters, I'm quite fond of Gollum. Or perhaps I'd like to be a Balrog. "Durin's Bane" appeals to me.

Paul Zimmer

R. D. #1

East Greenbush, N. Y.

- *Seems to me you sound more like "Fantastic's Bane."*

Dear Editor:

I say "hooray" for you. At last an s-f magazine with a dash of the supernatural. If you only knew how long I have been looking for this.

Will you please pass my congratulations along to Ede Witt for "The Convention." All descriptive phrases have been used to compliment an author so by now they are old and moldy. Just say I think that this story is a classic.

Mickey Daggett

Crescent City, Calif.

- *So noted, and passed, to the author.*

Dear Editor:

I have noticed in the last two issues or so of both *Amazing* and *Fantastic* only a couple of the stories have illustrations. Why?

There are several other s-f magazines on the stands that have no illustrations, except on the cover, and I don't read them. I feel that if the editors can't afford artists to at least put one illustration per story, I can't afford to read the magazine. *Amazing* and *Fantastic* have become two good friends of mine, and I don't feel this way about them, but I would appreciate illustrated stories.

Robert G. Bartels
205 Gelston Ave.
Brooklyn 9, N. Y.

• *We illustrate stories we feel are worth illustrating. Furthermore, we feel most readers would rather have an extra short story in the space saved.*

Dear Editor:

The May issue of *Fantastic* was a fine piece of work in my opinion. I would like to see more Rog Phillips and one other request: how about having one of your writers dream up something on a forgotten creature of the supernatural . . . the Harpy?

Jeff Paton
824 Austin Avenue
Park Ridge, Illinois

• *Please leave our editor, Miss Goldsmith, out of this!*

Dear Editor:

I heaved a sigh of relief when the results of the editorial preference questionnaire reached this area of the world. All along I had a horrid feeling that you were going to get a big vote for fact articles, for this seems to be the modern trend—to ruin great fiction magazines with Sunday supplement material. So I was delighted that all fiction won hands down.

The result of the other question asked, which gave a big majority of readers' wanting horror and weird stories, vindicates a belief I've held for a long time, that there is a big potential market for weird stories. The big majority vote for weird stories, has given you a mandate to go ahead and make *Fantastic* into a magazine which will be worthy to take the place of the late, lamented *Weird Tales*.

(Continued on page 130)



SHOPPING GUIDE

Classified

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(Continued)

(CLASSIFIED)

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ACCORDING TO YOU . . . (Continued from page 128)

I've got a complete collection of your magazine from the days of the old *Fantastic Adventures*, right up to the new *Fantastic* and I must say Ziff-Davis has done a wonderful job over the years. You have gone through a lot of different phases: the action stories of the old days, the "arty" literary stories of the first issues of the digest size and now the present trend to weird-horror, but they have all been good. Keep up the good work.

Roger Dard
Box S1387
GPO Perth,
Western, Australia

Dear Editor:

I recently read a copy of *Fantastic* for the first time and I consider it great. Not being too scientifically minded, I don't need a great deal of science fiction, but your magazine with its blend of fantasy, horror, and whimsy, ideally suits my reading tastes. I'd like to see more stories slanted towards horror, werewolves, vampires, etc. What about some stories by Robert Bloch?

I'd like to exchange anything from this part of the world for U. S. magazines. I have personally met science fiction writer A. Bertram Chandler and George Adamski the UFO expert.

Mary Cecile Brady
36 David Street
South Perth
West. Australia

• *Glad to hear we're on top Down Under.*

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